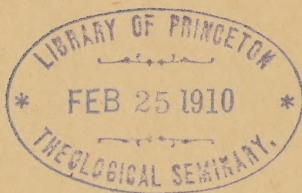


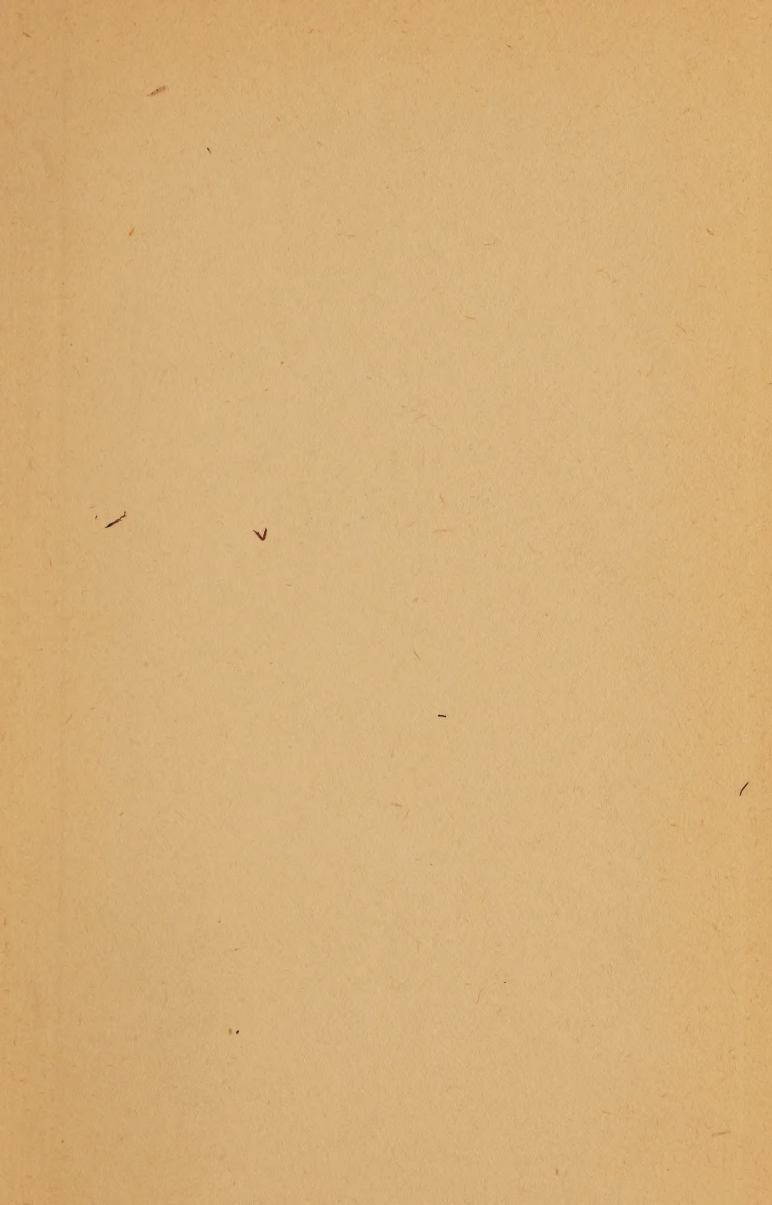
# THE INCARNATION

G.S. STREATFEILD, M.A.





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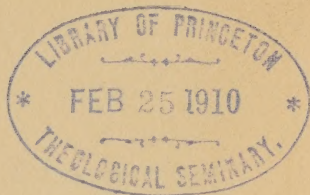






✓ Anglican Ch. Handbooks

# THE INCARNATION



✓ BY

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## PREFACE

THIS little book is not for the learned. It does not pretend to be a treatise on the Incarnation. The most that it aspires to is to be a brief introduction to the greatest of all subjects. Every thoughtful Christian can give reasons for the hope that is in him. This is what the writer has tried to do in the following pages, and he will be more than satisfied if those who read them are thereby induced to pass on to the works of those better qualified to teach.

The limitations of space have made it impossible to deal with many important questions inseparably connected with the doctrine of the Incarnation. No discussion will be found, for example, of the *kenosis*, the logos-teaching of the New Testament, the liability of our Lord's human nature to temptation, the cosmic significance of the Incarnation, the Resurrection, miracles, the theological value of the word Person. In the chapter on the Virgin Birth there is no attempt to deal with the genealogies, or to treat the question of *parthenogenesis* with the attention it demands. On these and other points the larger and more systematic works referred to by the writer must be consulted.



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# THE INCARNATION

## CHAPTER I

### JESUS CHRIST IN HISTORY

THE determining factor of belief in the Incarnation is of a spiritual nature. That it is an article of faith, not a matter of demonstration, prepares us for this conclusion. The truth summed up in the word Incarnation is one that satisfies the soul of man, who finds in the Incarnate Christ what he can find nowhere else—the revelation of a spiritual world, a definite and rational conception of a Supreme Being, an authoritative code of morals—above all, a Mediator through whom he may draw near to God, and enjoy communion with Him.

There is, however, another avenue through which the doctrine of the Incarnation makes its appeal. The appeal is to the intellect as well as the spirit. Reason demands that every effect shall have an adequate cause. The principle of dynamics is not confined to the physical world. Human history as well as the material universe has its dynamic power, the driving forces which have made it what it is. "A philosophy of history which gives no satisfactory account of the historical Christ is self-condemned. It fails at the decisive point."<sup>1</sup> The religious inquirer sets forth upon his quest as a student of history. As such he has to estimate the power that a religion based on a belief in the Incarnation has exercised in forming and moulding the history of the world. "We have not solved, or even apprehended, any one

<sup>1</sup> Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, ii. p. 267.

of the problems connected with the person of Christ until we have resolved the mystery of the place He has filled and the things He has achieved in the collective life of man.”<sup>1</sup>

To begin at the beginning:—We open our New Testament, and, setting aside for the moment the narratives of the Infancy and the question of their authenticity, we find ourselves in the presence of One who lived at the most for three and thirty years (during thirty of them in strictest privacy), whose single personality is the source of all that Christianity has been in the world and done for it. Belonging to a despised and hated race, born, in a remote corner of a Roman province, of lowly parentage and in humble circumstances, He possessed (it is obvious) no adventitious aids to fame and power. Gathering round Himself a few disciples, He taught from place to place amid increasing enmity from those in authority, and after three years of public life was put to the most shameful of deaths. Within thirty years of His crucifixion at Jerusalem He had disciples in every part of the Roman Empire and beyond it.

From the very first Christianity began to show what the centuries have demonstrated, namely, that it possessed the qualities of a universal religion. The external development of the Church is one of the most striking features of history. Statistics are not to be implicitly trusted, but it has been estimated that at the close of the first century the numerical strength of the Church was not less than five millions. Gibbon computed the proportion of Christians to heathen at the time of Constantine's conversion as one-twentieth.<sup>2</sup> Recent research has done much to throw doubt on the accuracy of this calculation, and the historian of to-day would give the proportion as much nearer one-fifth. The Emperor Maximin, the bitterest of the Church's enemies, the most active of her persecutors, gave as his reason for persecution the fact that almost all men were abandoning the worship of the gods and were attaching themselves to the Christian cult. Forty years later, the Emperor Julian, according to his own account, found, in the famous temple of Daphne at Antioch, a single

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Decline and Fall*, ii. (chap. xv.) p. 186.



aged priest sacrificing a goose at his own expense. Whether we interpret the statement literally or hyperbolically, it strongly confirms the impression that Gibbon greatly underrated the Christian population of the Empire in the first years of the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> So complete, in fact, was the external triumph of Christianity by the middle of the century that Julian's attempt to revivify the cause of paganism was doomed to failure because a glaring anachronism. The world around watched and wondered; "neither friends nor enemies seemed able to take him quite seriously."<sup>2</sup> The death-blow to paganism had been struck, and struck, not by a philosophy that knew not God, but by a Teacher who proclaimed the Divine Fatherhood, and claimed for Himself a universal kingdom; but a kingdom not of this world. Briefly, it may be said that even before the end of the third century the various forms of paganism were rapidly giving place in every quarter of the world to the faith of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The tide never turned. Age after age the adherents of Christianity multiplied, its organisation spread. At the present moment it is not only a fact that the countries professing Christianity have a population of five hundred millions, but that, almost without exception, Christianity stands for progress and civilisation.<sup>4</sup> The progressive races of to-day, speaking generally, are those that have accepted Christianity as the only reasonable, or even possible, religion. From the very first the influence of the Church was to civilise and refine. If it failed, as it did, to save a decadent Empire, it proved to be the one power that could master the barbarian hordes that swept down upon the western possessions of Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries. In the midst of social chaos, in spite of growing corruption and superstition, the Church

<sup>1</sup> See the question discussed in Professor Orr's *Neglected Factors in the Study of the Early Progress of Christianity*, p. 35 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> In the year 368, five years after the death of Julian, the word *paganism* first occurs in a law of Valentinian, indicating that the towns by that time were mainly Christian, and that the old creeds were driven back into the *pagi*, or country districts. See Bigg, *Neoplatonism*, p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> Twenty years ago we might have said "without exception." The rise and history of Japan require some modification of earlier conclusions on this point.

exercised a humanising power of restraint and guidance which made for order, liberty, social morality—indeed, all that we mean by civilisation in the best sense of the word.

Christianity did not, could not, as we have admitted, save the Empire from dissolution, but quietly, unobtrusively, it had leavened an ever-increasing proportion of the Empire with its spirit. "The history of the first three centuries—the first complete period, and that a period of spontaneous evolution in the Christian body—is an epitome or a figure of the whole work of the Faith. It is the history of a three-fold contest between Christianity and the powers of the old world, closed by a threefold victory. The Church and the Empire started from the same point and advanced side by side. They met in the market and the house; they met in the discussions of the schools; they met in the institutions of political government; and in each place the Church was triumphant. In this way Christianity asserted, once for all, its sovereign power among men by the victory of common life, by the victory of thought, by the victory of civil organisation. These first victories contain the promise of all that later ages have to reap."<sup>1</sup>

After all, however, it is not so much the power of self-propagation inherent in Christianity that we have to bear in mind as the character of the work that it accomplished. St. Paul at the opening of its career declared his Gospel to be the "savour of life unto life." We may go behind the apostle and hear the Master say to His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth," "Ye are the light of the world." Tracing the history of the new faith from its infancy onwards, we can see how such words were justified by the event. From the first the Church was a reforming power within the Empire.<sup>2</sup> Paganism had not the moral force to initiate and carry out social reforms. The Christian Church had the power, and, through good report and evil, exercised it. With its ideal of universal brotherhood, its allegiance to an unseen but ever-present King—observing a purity of life in startling contrast with the

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *Religious Thought in the West*, p. 195. The same writer says that Christianity captured first the heart, then the intellect, finally the State. *Canon of the New Testament*, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 185.

laxity of morals that was sapping the strength of Rome—cherishing a hope of immortality which stimulated the sacrifice of present enjoyment in the interests of the future—the Christian Church gradually absorbed into itself all that was worth preserving in the existing world, and forced society, in spite of itself, to acknowledge Christ as Master.

The whole course of history was so powerfully affected by Christianity that it is a common thing to describe the Church as revolutionising the world. To the universal pessimism of the Stoic it opposed an invincible optimism, an optimism springing from faith in a personal God and a divine purpose of love. Throughout the decadent ages of Roman history it held on its way, assimilating from the world around, whether in philosophy or religion, all that was true and elevating, but imparting infinitely more than it received. In its presence and through its influence the Stoic was humanised, and learned to practise what he had long preached concerning the brotherhood of man. Whilst the philosopher counselled suicide, and gladiators were spilling their blood for the amusement of the populace, Christianity was inculcating the inviolable sacredness of human life; whilst sight-seers flocked to the theatres to gaze on scenes and listen to words of shameless obscenity, and whilst things unspeakable were being done in every class of society without remonstrance from pagan teacher or hindrance from pagan law, Christianity was creating a new ideal by enforcing among its adherents the principle of purity. Throughout the same period the Church was implanting in the breast of the community a spirit of humanity and active charity to which the pre-Christian world was a stranger, and destined, as time went on, to cover the earth with institutions of mercy.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we see Christianity as a power, generation after generation, making for righteousness, exercising on society a moral influence, not only incomparably higher, but incomparably stronger than any that the world had hitherto known. To quote the more than unprejudiced words of Gibbon—“While that great body” (*i.e.* the Roman Empire) “was invaded by open violence or undermined by slow decay, a pure

<sup>1</sup> See also chap. xi.



and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol.”<sup>1</sup> There is more in the words, “derived new vigour from opposition,” than may appear on the surface, for the term *opposition* is the historian’s euphemism for cruel persecution; and he thus reminds us that Christianity had introduced, or rather made effective, the principle of sacrifice. To call that principle new with the history of Hebrew thought, as expressed by the prophets, before us, would be false; but now, as taught and practised by the Church, it became a formative power in the world.<sup>2</sup> “The history of self-sacrifice during the last eighteen hundred years has been mainly the history of the action of Christianity upon the world.”<sup>3</sup> This pure and humble religion derived new vigour from opposition; the very law of its existence, the secret therefore of its vitality and growth, was self-sacrifice.

Concomitant with this new moral force, and, indeed, as we know, the mainspring of it, was a spiritual energy which still more emphatically suggests a transcendental origin. The superiority of New Testament teaching in respect of God and the things unseen to that of contemporary pagan philosophy is undisputed. “The windows of heaven had been opened, and through the revelation of Jesus Christ a rich flood of new and divine inspiration had come down upon the earth.”<sup>4</sup> Even those who would dispute the possibility of supernatural inspiration, and who find no place for God in their theory of history, will not deny the fact that, at the beginning of the Christian era, there was an extraordinary development of the religious spirit; nor is there any question as to the power displayed by Christianity in discrediting and supplanting the pagan systems which, at the time of our Lord’s birth, divided the world amongst them.

Nothing, perhaps, is more remarkable in the history of

<sup>1</sup> *ut supra*, ii. p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> See Kidd, *Principles of Western Civilisation*, p. 201. Cp. Church, *Gifts of Civilisation*, p. 201; Caird, *Evolution of Religion*, ii. p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> Lecky, *Rise and Influence of Rationalism*, ii. p. 372.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Percy Gardner, *Historic View of the New Testament*, p. 247.

Christianity than the tone adopted by "apologists" who rose to defend the Faith when attacked in the second and third centuries by some of the keenest intellects of East and West. Their attitude was that of the Hebrew prophet; they speak not with bated breath and deprecating air, but rather as those who fully believe that their Faith is destined to revolutionise and dominate the world; the future is theirs, and they know it. The battle was decided, as we have seen, before the end of the third century; early in the fourth, the Emperor, on grounds of policy rather than conviction, espoused their cause, and took his part in the Council of Nicæa. Still more notably, perhaps, was the attitude of the apologists vindicated when the Christian Church succeeded in taming the barbarian conquerors of the Western empire and made them the founders of modern society and civilisation. "By consolidating the heterogeneous and anarchical elements that succeeded the downfall of the Roman Empire, by infusing into Christendom the conception of a bond of unity that is superior to the divisions of nationhood, and of a moral tie that is superior to force, by softening slavery into serfdom and preparing the way for the ultimate emancipation of labour, Catholicism laid the very foundations of modern civilisation."<sup>1</sup>

Now, however, to come to the crucial point in regard to the subject we are treating—what was the real source of this stream of tendency, this vastness of effect? We believe that there is but one answer, namely, the personal influence of Jesus Christ. Many attempts have been made to dispute this conclusion—attempts, not merely to minimise His power, but even to throw doubt upon His very existence as an historic person; but we feel confident that time and research will only help to establish the claim of Christ, not merely to be the supreme factor in history for the last eighteen hundred years, but also (in spite of monstrous misunderstandings and blunders on the part of the Church) to be the source of all that is best in the religious life of to-day and in the civilisation that we have inherited; that, in short, as it has been well said, Christ was the "well-spring of a new humanity."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *u.s.*, ii. p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Church, *u.s.*, p. 94.

It is impossible within the limits of our space to substantiate these assertions in detail, but the more closely we investigate the more clearly shall we see that it was the realised presence of a personal Christ which endowed the Church with her power to control and guide the course of history. The force of personality in the growth and development of the race is one of the commonplaces of sociological writers, and can be amply illustrated from history. Immeasurably the most striking example of this law of human nature is to be found in the power of the personal Christ working through His Church. The apostles and "apologists" believed in the triumph of their cause because they believed in Christ. The historic personality of our Lord was the keystone of their whole system of thought and activity. The irresistible momentum of Christianity resided in His person; the victories of the Church were the victories of Christ. "In all ages and under all circumstances the Christian life has ever radiated from this central fire."<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more obvious in the history of the early Church than the fact that its strength and vitality sprang from conscious union with a living Christ—that His realised presence was the secret of influence and progress.

The human life of Jesus was the ideal set up by the Church; but an ideal without motive force to render it effective would have been as useless for dealing with the masses in the days of Domitian and Diocletian as in our own. This indispensable dynamic was an assured faith in the living Christ. The Stoic could, and did, present a lofty ideal, but what influence had that ideal on mankind? The moral power of the highest pagan philosophy was a negligible quantity, because there was lacking that principle of self-propagation which Christian morality possessed through faith in Christ as the living Head of the Church. "Christ, who is our life" was just as truly the watchword of Irenæus, Origen and Athanasius as it was of St. Paul; it was in the power of this conviction that they and their fellow-labourers brought the pagan world to the feet of Christ. And as, in the pages of history, we watch the world arrested in the path of decadence, accepting His lead,

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, *Philippians*. Dissertation on *St. Paul and Seneca*, p. 325.



bowing to His authority, raising itself, beneath His spell, on stepping-stones of its dead self to higher conceptions of life and duty, the question is forced upon us—Who was He who exercised this mighty power?

The problem of Christianity is not exhausted by dealing with its original records. Criticism does not carry us very far in our inquiry; we have to think of development even more than origin. "When we forget the vital connection between the present and the past, and study origins without a reference to the things they originate, our historic method at once degenerates into pedantic antiquarianism."<sup>1</sup> The study of comparative religion leaves with us the conviction that Jesus Christ stands quite apart from all other religious founders and leaders, and if we fairly face the consideration, not only of what Christ has accomplished in history, but also of what, at the present day, He is to the higher life of the human race, we may well ask whether any naturalistic explanation of His person will satisfy the demands of historical science. "The marvel," as it has been said, "is not that the fishermen of Galilee conquered the world, but that Jesus of Nazareth made them its conquerors."<sup>2</sup> This is what has to be explained; and it is well that we should ask, at the outset of our inquiry into the subject of the Incarnation, whether rationalism has ever put forth a rational explanation of the person of Christ. Can it be asserted of any of the attempts that have been made that they are such as to satisfy the impartial inquirer? Their very multiplicity is proof of failure.

This, at least, has become increasingly clear, namely, that there is no real alternative between the Catholic interpretation of the person of Christ and that of a rationalism which altogether denies the union of the divine and human natures.<sup>3</sup> Arianism does not exist to-day in the world of thought; and those who deny the Godhead of Christ are logically bound to

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *Personality, Human and Divine*, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Fairbairn, *Studies in the Life of Christ*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> There is little need to modify the statement of Canon Liddon: "Arianism at this day has a very shadowy, if any real, existence; and the Church of Christ, holding in her hands the Creed of Nicæa, stands face to face with sheer Humanitarianism, more or less disguised, according to circumstances, by the thin varnish of an admiration yielded to our Lord on æsthetic or ethical grounds."—*Bampton Lectures*, p. 18.

interpret His person (or attempt an interpretation) in the terms of pure humanity. But is there any possible explanation of Christ, save the one which the Apostles taught and the Church received?

“Every conceivable tendency of thought,” says a distinguished German rationalist, “struggles for the possession of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The greatest representative of modern agnosticism, when compelled by the logic of experience to provide a system of worship for his disciples, chose for them the venerable symbol of the Virgin and her Son. Who is this, we ask, and cannot but ask, who is so essential to the higher thought and life of the world? As we began by pointing out, the determining factor of faith in the Incarnation is of a spiritual nature; but faith cannot reach its convictions without an appeal to the reason. And it is from this latter point of view that, in this opening section, we have approached the subject. What is our conclusion? Not that the Incarnation can be demonstrated, as we demonstrate mathematical truth, or prove it, as we prove scientific fact; but we find, when studying the history of the world, especially on its religious and ethical side, that in the Incarnation we have, if we may say so without irreverence, a working hypothesis. The law of gravitation, the existence of the luminiferous ether, the principle of evolution, have never yet been demonstrated, perhaps never will be; yet they are practically undisputed, because they account for what, apart from them, would be inexplicable. Each in its turn has become a working hypothesis of science; each has had to be postulated as the efficient cause, or indispensable condition, of demonstrable fact. It is in some such way that, from the intellectual standpoint, we accept the Christian dogma of the Incarnation. The most cogent intellectual proof of the Incarnation is that it solves problems for which there is no other solution.<sup>2</sup> To what other adequate or reasonable cause can we point for all that Christianity stands for? The Master-life of the world for these last nineteen hundred years is not the life of a mere man—and, if the life of more than man, is the life of God incarnate.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Harnack, *What is Christianity?* p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 70.

A few words must be added by way of disclaimer. Let it not be thought that there has been any intention in the preceding pages to overlook, much less deny, the grievous wrongs that have been inflicted upon the world in the name of Christ. The Church has reason to blush as she reads her own history, but the blush is for her own, not her Master's, imperfections. The corruption and retrogression of the Church began at a very early date. We can hardly read the ecclesiastical annals of the fourth century without relentings of heart towards the great apostate.<sup>1</sup> And if one must make this confession of the Church's failure before the fifth century, what of some of the later periods of her history? What of the "dark ages," the age of the Inquisition, the age of the Renaissance? During the eclipse of reason Christian theology sank to a level which would have revolted the Fathers, whilst in the Middle Ages cruelties were perpetrated in the name of the Christian's God that one might associate rather with the kingdom of Assyria than with the kingdom of heaven. But to lay the blame of this upon Christianity, much more upon the Founder of the Church, is not only to ignore the principle of evolution, but also grossly to violate the historic spirit; it would be as fair to pour contempt on the first table of the Decalogue because the land of Israel was full of idolatry for many centuries after the exodus, as to condemn Christianity because its spirit was so slowly and imperfectly assimilated. Indeed, the argument is the other way. For those who believe with Dean Stanley that, "so far from being effete, Christianity is yet undeveloped," the deeds of shame, the cruelties of persecution, the worldly ambition, the doctrinal and moral corruption that stain the pages of Church history witness unmistakably, by way of contrast, to the divinely inspired source of true Christianity. We admit to the full what has been so often urged against the Church, namely, that it has proved a curse as well as a blessing; and as we follow its checkered, often humiliating, story, our wonder is

<sup>1</sup> "The life of Julian is one of the noblest wrecks in history."—Gwatkin, *u.s.*, p. 106. Yet it must be borne in mind that, polluted though the Church was by worldly ambitions and base intrigues, it contrasted very favourably, even in these respects, with contemporary paganism. See Bigg, *u.s.*, p. 313.

that the Light which rose upon the world nineteen hundred years ago has not long since been quenched. May we not believe that St. John solves the problem in the prologue to his Gospel—"The Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness overcame it not"?<sup>1</sup> The darkness overcame it not, because that Light was none other than the Divine Logos : "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us."

## CHAPTER II

### PREPARATION FOR CHRIST IN THE GENTILE WORLD

It would be inconceivable to modern thought that a perfect, absolute, final religion should have burst upon the world without previous preparation—that is, without historical relations to the past. "God requireth that which is past"; this is true in the moral and spiritual, as well as in the physical world. Had not Christ come to *fulfil*—come, that is, to take up the past and carry it on—He would have been unintelligible to the world to which He came; His work would have failed for lack of a medium of communication. The advance of His kingdom is in no small part due to the fact of its intimate connection with modes of thought and belief already existing. It has been the habit of the past, perhaps, to find the historical preparation for the coming of Christ too exclusively in the annals of the Jewish nation; and, without question, the preparation was far more definite and significant in that limited sphere than in the world around. The study, however, of comparative religion reveals a far wider basis of preparation than that of the Hebrew economy. The centuries, it has been said, were in labour and travail with the coming Christ; and before we turn our thought to the central revelation vouchsafed to the Jew, we may look outside that central revelation for foreshadowings of Him who should

<sup>1</sup> John i. 5. *Overcame*, much to be preferred to *comprehended*. See Westcott's *Commentary* in loc.



come—a light to lighten the Gentiles, the glory of His people Israel.

As a matter of fact, it would be difficult to name a truth that finds its final expression in Christ and in the teaching of the New Testament which did not exist in embryo, or even in some developed, though distorted form in the pagan world. The Incarnation, the Atonement, the Sacraments, victory over death, all had their preparatory stage in heathen as well as Jewish thought. The very fact that Christian doctrine found readier access to pagan than to Jew bears witness to the work of the Divine Spirit in making ready the way of Christ among the nations.<sup>1</sup> Especially in regard to the main subject of our thought, namely, the Incarnation, there was less prejudice to be overcome in the mind of the heathen than of the Jew. This may be partly accounted for by the fact that the pagan was less seriously religious than the Jew, and that the bigotry so ingrained in the Hebrew was no part of a polytheism that established the cosmopolitan worship of the Pantheon. In part, however, it was due to what the Gentiles themselves believed; for in many parts of the world the first preachers of Christianity came in contact with beliefs and practices so suggestive of their own as to be denounced by the Church as travesties of truth and the work of the Evil One.

These resemblances must now occupy our attention for a little space, since it is obvious that they may be viewed from two opposite standpoints according to the prepossession of the inquirer.

The rationalist quotes these points of likeness as in large measure, if not altogether, the explanation of the Christian religion. And, doubtless, it is startling to the Christian believer to find in the story of Osiris so much to remind him of the redemptive work of Christ—remarkable, too, that Oriental mysteries, which took root in the West almost simultaneously with Christianity, and found such ready acceptance throughout the Empire, should present to their votaries a suffering yet triumphant God. Our interest and wonder alike are increased when we learn that the Mithra cult had its initiatory

<sup>1</sup> St. Clair Tisdall, *Comparative Religion*, p. 82.

baptism, its consecrated meal,<sup>1</sup> its rite of confirmation,—that it taught mediation, expiation through blood-shedding, the resurrection of the dead, followed by a universal judgment and a second coming of Mithra. Nor does this exhaust the analogies between Mithraism and Christianity.

It is true that when these resemblances are carefully scrutinised many of them prove to be eminently superficial; and it is important to remember that “resemblances do not necessarily suppose imitation.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time they are unmistakably real; nor is it surprising that those who come to the subject with sceptical tendencies infer that Christianity is deeply in debt to the pagan mysteries, whilst some will go further and maintain that the religion of Christ was substantially a product of myths widely current at the opening of the Christian era. With such writers prejudice too often does duty for reason, and for this latter contention there is no shadow of proof. At the same time it must be admitted that the relation of Christianity to the Eastern religions, especially to that of Mithra, is very obscure, and it would be rash for the Christian apologist to deny that the cult of Mithra had any influence upon the ritual, and even the doctrines of the Church.<sup>3</sup> As the two religions went forward side by side, more or less dividing the world between them, nothing is more likely than that their influence should have been mutually exerted. But appealing, as we confidently can, to the historic foundation of our faith, we may rest fully assured that what Christianity borrowed and appropriated was superficial and insignificant. Without denying the reciprocal influence of Mithraism and Christianity, we are entirely justified

<sup>1</sup> On the connection between the Christian sacraments and the rites of other religions, see Illingworth, *Divine Immanence*, p. 141 ff. Dr. Illingworth would allow that the sacramental mysteries of these Oriental cults had considerable influence on the accessories of Christian worship.

<sup>2</sup> Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> See Gwatkin, *u.s.*, ii. p. 148; Cumont, *u.s.*, p. 194; Dill, *Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 5. It must further be remembered that the Church had no choice but, in some measure, to adopt the language of those to whom it brought its message. At the same time we must be on our guard against drawing the conclusion that similar terms stood for similar things, whether doctrinal or institutional. See Cheetham, *Mysteries, Pagan and Christian*, pp. 15, 74, 75.

in believing that the essential elements of the Christian religion are wholly independent of every pagan cult with which it came in contact.<sup>1</sup>

That what was borrowed was of little weight or significance should, surely, be almost beyond dispute from the attitude which the early Church adopted towards those Eastern religions with which she found herself confronted. Speaking generally, that attitude was one of uncompromising hostility. From the second century onwards Christian apologists recognised in these *mysteria* the most dangerous foe of their faith. Whilst many of the Fathers, especially after the decline of Gnosticism, almost held out the right hand of fellowship to poets and philosophers,—whilst Augustine could describe Cicero's treatise *De Philosophiâ* as a porch to the "Temple not made with hands," whilst Clement of Alexandria speaks of philosophy as a schoolmaster leading to Christ, and Jerome alludes to Seneca as *Noster Seneca*, the *religions* of the world, whether of East or West, were treated in very different fashion. Idolatry in every form was an abomination to the early Christian. Mixed with much that was pure and good in these Eastern cults (and this purer element was especially strong in Mithraism) there were constituents the reverse of edifying, and altogether opposed to the lofty requirements of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Is it conceivable that the Christian, under these circumstances, laid himself

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the pagan environment of Christianity, Dr. Illingworth says, "Environment does not and cannot create, but it elicits new characteristics in plant or animal, while the creative capacity comes from within. The growth of the early Church, both in doctrine and practice, was analogous to this. It possessed an intense individuality, an intense vitality, an intense identity of its own. And when brought into contact with Greek and Roman life and thought, it lost none of this identity by the fact, but only appropriated what was best and truest in the surrounding life and thought to its own purposes, thus utilising the alien environment as a means of increased self-realisation. At a later date than that of which we are speaking (*i.e.* to 381) this would not of course be equally true."—*Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> See Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to M. Aurelius*, p. 625; Cheetham, *u.s.*, p. 123, who calls attention to the history of the word *δρῆμα*. Meaning, originally, things done with a religious purpose, it came to signify, in the first century after Christ, certain frantic secret rites believed to be accompanied with great impurity.

under material obligation to the pagan? Surely St. Augustine supplied the Church with a clue to the problem before us when he wrote, "What we now call the Christian religion existed from the dawn of the human race, though it only began to be named Christian when Christ came in the flesh."<sup>1</sup>

The failure of philosophy and the success of Mithraism alike witnessed to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. The priests and prophets of Mithra understood the fundamental needs of human nature better than the philosopher; Mithraism succeeded where philosophy failed, because it approached man with what one need not scruple to call a scheme of salvation. With that sense of sin, which was the peculiar creation of Christianity, Mithraism did not, could not, deal; yet, realising the discord at the heart of things mundane, especially in the world of man, it had its ritual of expiation; it approached man on his spiritual side; it took, as its basis of operations, man's affinity with God and his inherent relation to the unseen and eternal; it provided the means of grace for the purpose of mystic communion.<sup>2</sup>

The Stoic philosophy which was in possession of the world of thought at the beginning of the Christian era<sup>3</sup> had no such doctrine to propound. In its inmost essence it was materialistic; being such it inevitably developed a spirit of pessimism, and it had reached this stage before the earliest days of the Empire.<sup>4</sup> This dreary pessimism of philosophic thought stood in striking contrast with the optimism of the

<sup>1</sup> *Retract*, i. 13. Quoted by Lightfoot in *St. Paul and Seneca, Philippians*, p. 325. Long before Augustine, Justin Martyr insisted strongly upon God's witness to Himself among the Gentiles, fully recognising the truth that "there is unconscious prophecy in human thought corresponding to the conscious prophecy of Hebrew seers."—Ottley, *Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Archdeacon Cheetham does not hesitate to say, "The Mysteries thus attempted to cover precisely the same ground which was in due time occupied by the Christian Church. They exhibit very strongly those yearnings of humanity which the Incarnation of the Son of God was to satisfy."—*u.s.*, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> This should, perhaps, be stated with some reservation, since, in the earliest days of Christianity, Philonism had attracted much attention, and had found many adherents in the ranks of philosophy.

<sup>4</sup> For a good account of the later Stoicism, see Dill, *u.s.*, and Lightfoot's essay on *St. Paul and Seneca*.



Gospel, an optimism of which Christ Himself was both the example and the source. Nor is it difficult to see that the despair of the philosopher predisposed the world towards Christianity, producing, as it did, the conviction that no light would ever be thrown upon the deeper problems of life except from above. Stoicism, then, without a personal God<sup>1</sup>—without, therefore, any true object of worship—without mediator, without sacrifice, without sacraments, without hope of immortality, could not, as regards influence, compete even with Mithraism and other Oriental cults,—much less with Christianity, which gave all that they gave and infinitely more. What power Mithraism possessed was exercised in virtue of its real, though superficial, resemblance to Christianity. The moral and spiritual influence of the ancient Mysteries lay in the fact that they tentatively met the wants that the Gospel fully met, and suggested truths which could only be clearly revealed in the Incarnation. Mithraism was as truly, though not as definitely and fully, a preparatory system as Judaism itself. “Isis, Serapis, along with Mithra, were preparing the Western world for the religion which was to appease the long travail of humanity by a more perfect vision of the Divine.”<sup>2</sup>

We have dwelt at some length upon Mithraism and kindred cults because the analogies which they furnish to Christianity are more striking than can be found elsewhere,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Stoics often use personal terms in reference to God, speaking of Him as Father, King, &c., but the language expressed no corresponding reality. See Bigg, *Neoplatonism*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Dill, *u.s.*, p. 574.

<sup>3</sup> It may be added that myths originating, in the first instance, in ancient Babylonia are much quoted at the present day in rationalistic circles as the source of Christian doctrine, including the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and Ascension. Space will only allow of saying that these resemblances to Christianity, so far as they can be substantiated, may, like those of Mithraism, be regarded as foreshadowings of Christian truth. The well-known German scholar A. Jeremias, from an orthodox point of view, boldly maintains that the Babylonian mythology was a pre-ordained preparation for the Gospel. Those who, like Cheyne, Gunkel, and Jensen, treat Christianity as the direct offspring of Babylonian myths, fail to produce evidence that either Jewish or primitive Christian thought was in any way affected by them. The subject is ably discussed by Professor Orr in *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 235 ff.

and because, for this very reason, in these religions the Christian faith found its most powerful rivals. But it is not only in the mystery cults of the ancient world that foreshadowings of the Incarnation meet us. Long before Magna Mater, the precursor of all the Oriental superstitions that drifted westward, gained a footing in Europe, some two hundred years before the birth of Christ, the spiritual undercurrent of the world's thought was setting Christward, and expressed itself in belief and worship of many kinds, in many parts of the Gentile world. The study of comparative religion makes it clear that, so far from the Incarnation being incredible, the idea of such a union of natures was embedded in human thought and found expression in many ways.<sup>1</sup> In the poetry of Greece how unfettered is the intercourse between gods and men! Mythology seems to revel in the picture of gods in human form; it is nothing strange that the people of Lycaonia should have taken Barnabas for Jupiter and Paul for Mercurius. The statuary of Greece witnesses to the conviction that ideal man was the nearest expression of the Divine to which the mind of man could attain.<sup>2</sup> The apotheosis of the Emperor, although in its essence the very antithesis of the Christian conception of the Incarnation, proves that, to the consciousness of that age, there was no impassable gulf between the human and the Divine—whilst all down the ages, and all over the world, the rite of sacrifice seemed to point the way to Calvary.<sup>3</sup>

As we turn from these characteristic features of ancient heathenism to the New Testament, is it fanciful or irrational to believe that in Jesus Christ all lines concentrated, all broken lights merged—that “the Son of God at His coming in the flesh took up the unfulfilled promises of all human systems”?<sup>4</sup> “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together

<sup>1</sup> See Illingworth, *Divine Immanence*, pp. 80, 81; St. Clair Tisdall, *u.s.*, p. 44 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Trench, *The Unconscious Prophecies of Heathendom*, p. 196. Cp. Bigg, *u.s.*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> “The darkest rites of the ancient worships, both Semitic and European, may all be understood as a search for a true atoning sacrifice.”—Gwatkin, *u.s.*, i. p. 274. Cp. St. Clair Tisdall, *u.s.*, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Trench, *u.s.*, p. 258. Cp. Scott Lidgett, *The Christian Religion*, p. 247.

until *now*," said St. Paul; at last it had come to the birth. Conscious and unconscious prophecies alike were fulfilled, or were in course of fulfilment, in Him and through Him in whom all fulness dwells. All history led up to Christ, but it could not produce Him; "when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son."

The fulness of time was come;—the Christian apostle is not the only witness to this. The temper of the age expressed the same conviction, though without the faith and hope that crowned the thought of St. Paul. Allusion has already been made to the pessimistic tone of philosophy in the early decades of imperial Rome. But pessimism was not confined to philosophy; it affected every aspect of life and thought. The old Latin cult, which had once commanded the allegiance of Rome, had lost its popularity and power. Augustus revived its formal exercise, but could not put fresh life into it. Seneca may be regarded as the typical representative of serious pagan thought in the Neronian age, and "in Seneca we reach the sad gospel of a universal pessimism."<sup>1</sup> It is a "lost world that he sees before him, trying fruitless anodynes for its misery, holding out its hands for help from every quarter."<sup>2</sup> This, however, was nothing new. A century earlier, in the last years of the Republic, the gloom of despondency had settled over Rome. Man, it was confessed, had come to the end of his resources, and was only sinking from one stage of decay to another. Forty years before the birth of Christ, Virgil, in his fourth Eclogue, expressed the prevalent sense of universal need. "The Roman world needed a Saviour; it was conscious of its need; it was convinced that only Divine intervention could furnish a Saviour for it."<sup>3</sup> Was it, in every sense, an undesigned coincidence that that poem should embody the vision (borrowed, it can hardly be questioned, from the Hebrew Scriptures) of a golden age and a divine child—a vision which will always rank high among the unconscious prophecies of the kingdom of Christ?

— Concurrent with this deepening pessimism and this loss of faith in the ancient gods, there was a spiritual awakening—

<sup>1</sup> Dill, *u.s.*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsay, *Expositor*, ser. vii. vol. iv. p. 109.

“an imperious craving for some guide of life, some medicine for the deeply felt maladies of the soul.”<sup>1</sup> The movement of speculative thought was in the direction of monotheism.<sup>2</sup> Conceptions of Providence, Fatherhood, mediation, spiritual communion, were in the air, and were preparing the way alike for Mithra and for Christ. For some generations the issue of the struggle between Mithraism and the Church might have appeared doubtful;<sup>3</sup> but Mithraism, rooted in fable,<sup>4</sup> and inextricably bound up with systems of idolatry far grosser than its own, was doomed to defeat. In the place of wild and unintelligible legend, Christianity offered “the narrative of a Divine life instinct with human sympathy.”<sup>5</sup> Whilst heathen cults freely borrowed from one another, and thus betrayed the weakness of their foundation, the Church would make no terms with any of them. On the contrary, she stood firm to the truth once delivered to the saints, and the yearnings which had obtained alleviation in the Mysteries of Mithra found satisfaction in the Gospel of Christ.

All pointed in the same direction—the failure of philosophy, the decay of ancient religions, the awakening of new spiritual life; all joined with the apostle to declare that the set time had come when all flesh should see the salvation of God. The secrets and problems of human life could only be solved by a Word of revelation—such a Word as that which Plato had ventured to conceive, if not anticipate. The Divine Word<sup>6</sup> of Plato’s dream had come—come in the person of Jesus Christ. And, as we read the description given by the philosopher in his *Republic* of the righteous man, we turn instinctively to the Son of Man as fulfilling, and far more than fulfilling, that loftiest ideal of pagan thought. Indeed, it was with this passage before him that Clement of Alexandria represents Plato as coming near to foretelling the Christian

<sup>1</sup> Dill, *u.s.*, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> “All the best men of this period were striving after a kind of monotheism.”—Bigg, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 331. Cp. Dill, *u.s.*, p. 77 ff.; *Lux Mundi*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> For a history of the struggle between Mithraism and Christianity, see Dill, *Last Century of the Western Empire*, book i. ch. iv., book ii. ch. i.

<sup>4</sup> See Cumont, *u.s.*, p. 129 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to M. Aurelius*, p. 621.

<sup>6</sup> Ἀβγος Θεῖος.



dispensation.<sup>1</sup> And yet, in reality, how far ! For it was just this coming in the flesh which, all down the ages, repelled the Platonist, who set aside with contempt the very idea of God stooping to incarnation and suffering. "Augustine read in the books of the Platonists that the Word was God, and that by Him all things were made ; but that the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us, this he did not read there."<sup>2</sup>

Very instructive in this connection is the last stage of the conflict for supremacy between Christianity and paganism. In this closing struggle paganism had for its allies some of the acutest thinkers and one of the most powerful philosophic systems that the world has ever produced. This is no place to sketch the rise and fall of the Neoplatonic movement (Platonic in essence as well as in name);<sup>3</sup> this, however, must be said, that, notwithstanding its bitter hostility to the religion of the Cross, Neoplatonism, by the similarity of its teaching, in many respects, to that of Christianity, hastened the triumph of the Church, and must, therefore, be reckoned among the handmaids of the Gospel. Its doctrine of an unapproachable Deity could never satisfy the instincts of humanity ; its self-centred and introspective morality could never move the world ; its attempt to rehabilitate polytheism was a hopeless anachronism ; but its clear teaching as to the transcendence of God, its firm belief in Providence and in the immortality of the soul, its insistence on self-mastery and mystic union with God, helped to prepare the world for the religion of the Incarnation, which made all these elements of truth its own.

It was not only the general life, but also the deeper thought of the Church that was indebted to the Neoplatonist, for the speculations of Plotinus and his school did much to clear the thought of great Christian thinkers like Origen and Athanasius in grappling with metaphysical problems connected with the Being and nature of God.<sup>4</sup> Neoplatonism may therefore,

<sup>1</sup> On Plato as a forerunner of Christ, see Westcott, *Religious Thought in the West*, p. 1 ff. Of the "myths" of Plato he says, "The life of Christ is, in form no less than in substance, the Divine reality of which the myths were an instructive foreshadowing."—p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Bigg, *Neoplatonism*, p. 332, and cp. p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

from this point of view also, be justly regarded as forming part of an age-long preparation for the kingdom of Christ. The history of the movement itself is a melancholy one. Never dissociated, not even by Plotinus, from the old pagan worship and magic, it fell more and more beneath the sway of polytheism, until in the teaching of Proclus in the fourth century, Plato would have almost failed to find a trace of his influence.<sup>1</sup> It was the expiring effort of polytheism. The gods of Greece and Rome, of Egypt and the East, had their day and passed into oblivion; "all failed because ultimately all rested upon a belief which rested upon nothing."<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### PREPARATION FOR CHRIST IN JEWISH HISTORY

IT has long been acknowledged that "there is no rational religion outside theism,"<sup>3</sup> and we have already urged that the sudden appearance of an absolute and universal religion is inconceivable to modern thought, dominated, as it is, by the principle of evolution. If, then, the Christian religion be the full and final revelation of God to man, we should expect to find its roots in a theistic, rather than a polytheistic, system of thought, and that while polytheism might furnish, as we have tried to show was the case, adumbrations of a higher, truer conception of the Divine, the immediate precursor of the Christian religion must be a form of faith far more akin to itself, more definitely prophetic than any pagan cult of that which was to come. It will be our endeavour in this chapter to illustrate the familiar truth that the religious economy of the Jews formed the special seed-plot of Christianity, and that, as such, it possessed a promise, and provided a prepara-

<sup>1</sup> "Neoplatonism in the last stage adopted the whole pagan system, and, in an inevitable decline, lent even the forces of philosophy to deepen the superstition of the age."—Dill, *Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 88; cp. Bigg, *u.s.*, p. 322 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Bigg, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Gwatkin, *u.s.*, i. p. 14.

tion for Christ that are to be found in no other religion. In doing so we must not lose sight of the immediate subject of our inquiry, namely, the Incarnation; and it is to this central truth of Christianity that our thoughts must turn, as we briefly survey the promises and anticipations of the Old Testament.

It is important in this connection to bear in mind that Judaism from the first, so far as can be ascertained, in recognising man's affinity with God, avoided the dualism of Greek philosophy, which rendered the truth of the Incarnation inconceivable. The opening sentences of the Hebrew Scriptures declared man to be made in the image of God, therefore capable of union and communion with Him. Thus was the way cleared for God's revelation of Himself in the Incarnation. In contrast with the dualism, which could find no point of contact between absolute and concrete, finite and infinite, material and spiritual, the Jew recognised mediatorial relations and functions in man himself. Combined with this belief in man's affinity to God was the conviction that nothing short of the realised presence of the Living God could satisfy the spiritual and intellectual conditions of human life. "The goal of the religion of Israel is the indwelling of God in man. The coming of Jehovah in His fulness is the end to which the prophets of Israel look."<sup>1</sup> Such was the hope of Israel. Generation after generation was this hope voiced by the prophets in terms appropriate to their own age and environment; nor did disappointment extinguish the hope. Combine these two great principles of Jewish religious thought, the divine image in man, the expected advent of Jehovah, and we see the foundations on which the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation might be laid.

Further, the study of Jewish thought, as expressed in the Old Testament, leaves upon the mind an impression of incompleteness, which is not made in anything like the same degree by other religions. There is a forward movement in the mind of the Jew which demands fulfilment. The spirit of expectation is the special characteristic of Hebrew history as a whole. The last of the prophets was fully persuaded that there was something better to come—"Behold, I will send

<sup>1</sup> Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, "Incarnation," i. p. 798.

My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me ; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple." (Mal. iii. 1.) What is still more remarkable is that, even when the gift of prophecy had confessedly ceased, this spirit of expectation gathered force and increased in intensity until it became nothing short of a passion in the hearts of the faithful. "In this attitude of intense expectation culminated the preparation in history for the coming of Christ ; it was in the midst of it that He came, and to it that He appealed." <sup>1</sup>

The forward movement of thought in the Old Testament may well, to the reflective mind, constitute an unanswerable proof of God's educational and redemptive purpose, consummated in the Christian revelation. And if we look for a moment at the chief features of this movement, we shall surely see that Israel's hope was a definite one, finding definite fulfilment in the historic Christ.

Few would deny that in the writings of the Old Testament we trace the development of a pure and exalted theism ; but it was much more than this. In the doctrine of God as taught by the prophets we have the preparation for that which distinguishes the Christian from every other form of theism, namely, the Incarnation. The study of the Old Testament discloses a manifold anticipation of this truth, which, indeed, is the master-key to the mysteries of Old and New Testament alike. This St. John clearly recognised as he wrote the prologue to his Gospel. In the person and in the life of the Son of Man he saw realised the ideal which for centuries had been before the Jewish people in the opening words of their own Scriptures. Following the lead of St. John, the world has seen in Jesus Christ an ideal humanity, and found in that ideal humanity the unveiling of Deity. "In the beginning was the Word. . . . The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." (John i. 1, 14.) The *præparatio evangelica* begins with the statement, "God created man in His own image." The very possibility of the Incarnation, we may dare to say, lay in man's affinity to God. "Man was made in the image of God. The significance of this truth from our present point

<sup>1</sup> Sanday, *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 52.



of view is, that in that original constitution of manhood lies, as the Fathers saw, the prophecy of the divine Incarnation and the grounds of its possibility. God can express Himself in His own image; He can express Himself therefore in manhood—He can show Himself as man.”<sup>1</sup>

As we trace the history of the chosen people, we see foregleams of this truth lighting more and more the path of revelation. “The idea of an Incarnation was so constantly suggested in speech and symbol that no Jew attentive to the teaching of the Old Testament could have pronounced such an idea impossible or incredible.”<sup>2</sup> Again, “the ultimate regeneration of humanity through the instrumentality of a specially prepared instrument is the cardinal fact of all Old Testament revelation.”<sup>3</sup> That a religion which had all along insisted on the essential affinity between God and man, and which consistently taught that man was made in the image of God, should have attained its consummation and goal in the Incarnation should not seem irrational to those who believe in progressive revelation.

In dealing with this subject we do not appeal as confidently as our fathers to what are known as the “theophanies”;<sup>4</sup> at the least, however, these spiritual experiences, recorded in the Old Testament, express an intuition (not confined, as we have seen, to the Jew) that the Divine might clothe itself in human form. Meanwhile, the voice of Messianic prophecy is unmistakable, presenting the portrait of One having divine as well as human attributes, and awakening the expectation that the Lord would come in person to Zion, as Saviour, King, and Judge; whilst in the later Jewish literature the personification of Wisdom prepared the ground for the Christian doctrine of the Logos.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *Bampton Lectures on the Incarnation*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Edghill, *Evidential Value of Prophecy*, p. 41. Professor G. Adam Smith speaks of “the Old Testament instinct that the Divine should take human form and tabernacle amongst men.”—*Isaiah*, vol. i. p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> We must not, however, forget the important part that the theophanies played in the theology of the early Church.

<sup>5</sup> Ewald said of the noblest of the apocryphal writings—the Book of Wisdom—that it contains “a premonition of John and a preparation for Paul.”

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of Old Testament prophecy is the confident expectation of a kingdom of righteousness—a kingdom of which the prophet was the divinely commissioned harbinger. This Messianic kingdom is to be universal,<sup>1</sup> ruled by One, who, while of Davidic descent, is yet so closely associated with Jehovah as to be often identified with Him. Is it too much to say that the Incarnation satisfies the thought and reconciles the paradoxes of prophecy? “The kingdom of God upon earth—this is the great hope of prophecy. The kingdom of God upon earth—this is the great fact of Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>

Inseparably bound up with the truth of the Incarnation is the principle of mediation. The mediatorial character of Messiah’s work is assumed from first to last in the New Testament. Was this first heard from the lips of apostles and evangelists, or was their teaching upon this point rooted in the Old Testament? As a matter of fact, by no other religious conception can the continuity of Old and New Testament teaching be more forcibly illustrated than by this particular feature; not, as we have already seen, that it belongs exclusively to the Bible. Found in almost every system of religion, it appears to belong to very early, if not the earliest, spiritual intuitions of man. As, however, with other primary elements of religious thought, the principle of mediation finds its highest, truest expression in the history of faith as recorded in the Bible. Prophet and priest alike stood in a mediatorial relation to the Jewish people.

The work of the prophet was that of a mediator. The mediatorial office of Moses, the typical representative of the prophetic order, was as distinctly recognised in the Jewish Church as it was by the Christian apostle: “The law was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator.”<sup>3</sup> In his own measure and in his own place every inspired prophet was a mediator of the Word. But the Old Testament seer claimed no finality for his message. Their belief and hope

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah ii. 1-4, xix. 18 ff., xlv. 6 ff., lx. ; Jonah iii. 1 ff., Zeph. ii. 11 ; Mal. i. 11 ; Pss. lxxxvi. 9, lxxxvii., &c.

<sup>2</sup> Edghill, *u.s.*, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. iii. 19. “The mediator is Moses. This is his common title in Jewish writers.”—Lightfoot, *in loc.*, p. 146.

were in One who, coming after them, should be preferred before them—One through whom God would speak new and fuller truth to His people. Nothing, indeed, is more conclusive as to the organic relation of the New Testament to the Old, or as to the perfecting of the imperfect by the Christ, than the assured conviction of those who had been nurtured in the ancient Scriptures that God had spoken His final word, not by Malachi or Daniel, but in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Not less prominent than the function of prophet in the Old Testament is that of priest. There is in the history of the Jewish people a deepening sense of guilt, both collective and individual, and with it a corresponding expression in their sacrificial system which prepared the way for the Cross. With the Book of Leviticus open before him, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews proclaims Christ Priest and Victim in one. He plainly saw, as we too may see, that "the priestly and sacrificial system pointed forward to the only sacrifice which can really atone God and man, namely, the self-oblation of a Divine-Human Mediator, who, as representative of the race, can offer not merely Himself for us, but us in and with Himself."<sup>2</sup> From the opened scroll of Isaiah's prophecy the Ethiopian eunuch learned that the great mystery of vicarious suffering presented in the portrait of the Servant of the Lord had been solved on Calvary; and that our Lord saw personalised in Himself that portrait can only be disputed by a forced and uncritical treatment of the Gospels. To read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, with kindred passages from the Psalter, and then to pass to the story of man's redemption by Jesus Christ, is to see exemplified, in the highest sphere of thought, the principle and the fact of fulfilment.

The doctrine of the resurrection of our Lord is so essential a part of the Christian faith, and is, moreover, so inseparably bound up with the truth of the Incarnation, that we naturally ask in what relation it stands to pre-Christian belief. The doctrine of a future life holds, we must admit, a less prominent place in the Old Testament than we might expect; but it is there. Beginning with the shadowy, undefined

<sup>1</sup> Heb. i. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 66.

conception of Sheol, common to all Semitic thought, it had grown before the Christian era by stages, which space forbids our tracing here, into a confident hope of resurrection.<sup>1</sup> To the Jew, nursed in that hope, a religion without the definite doctrine of immortality would have been self-condemned. The expectation, and its satisfaction through Christ, are alike matters of history; nor, surely, is it otherwise than fitting that a doctrine, which stands or falls with that of the Incarnation, should be the possession of the world through the personal experience of the Incarnate.

We may be unable to bring forward many specific passages from the Old Testament definitely and directly leading up to this cardinal truth of Christianity; it may, however, be confidently affirmed that the truth is entirely in harmony with the prophetic writings. It has, indeed, been contended that the Passion-Scriptures, with their sequel of triumph, postulate the fact of the Messiah's resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Certain it is that Strauss did not hesitate to trace the primitive belief in the empty tomb, and all that it meant for the Church, to hopes awakened and nurtured by the study of the Old Testament. The first preachers of the Gospel appealed with confidence to Pss. xvi. 10, cxviii. 22, as prophecies of Christ's resurrection; nor can it be doubted that every mention, or even suggestion, of resurrection from the dead in the Old Testament would, to the mind of the apostles, point to the rising again of Christ; for, as St. Paul urges, if man is to rise, Christ must have risen; He must be the firstfruits of them that sleep. And the Church has found no difficulty in accepting the

<sup>1</sup> "To Jesus the Old Testament Scriptures, as a whole, conveyed the pledge of the will and power of God to raise the dead who had lived to Him."—*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, "Resurrection of the Dead," ii. p. 516. Christ proclaimed the doctrine on various occasions: Mark xii. 18-27; Luke xvi. 31; John v. 28, 29; vi. 39, 40, 44; xi. 23. According to the Synoptists, our Lord hardly ever spoke of His death without an intimation of His rising again on the third day. He saw an allusion to His own resurrection in Ps. cxviii. 22. See Matt. xxi. 42.

<sup>2</sup> "Although His resurrection is not actually mentioned, it is necessarily implied (*i.e.* in Isaiah liii. 9-11). The language is really incompatible with the idea of merely spiritual activity. We may therefore assert with confidence that the Servant is spoken of as dying and rising again from the dead."—Edghill, *u.s.*, p. 307.



explicit statement that Christ "rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures." (1 Cor. xv. 4.)

We must be content with simply reminding our readers that another very important feature in the preparation for Christ is found in the religious education of the Hebrew race. The subject is a large one, and, in its details, not without difficulty; but, viewed in broad outline, it can hardly be disputed that the progressive teaching of the Old Testament had its fitting culmination in the New. In this respect also Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil.

The subject will be dealt with later, but it must be here pointed out that the appeal of Christ Himself was, from first to last, to the Scriptures; they testified of Him (John v. 39). This is as unmistakable in the Synoptics as in the fourth Gospel. "Nothing is clearer or more striking than the place that the preparatory work of the Old Testament occupied from the outset in the declaration of the Gospel. Jesus Himself spake of the scribes of the kingdom as bringing forth out of their treasure things new and old; and laid it down as a first principle of His kingdom that He was 'not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' While with surprising and commanding clearness He centres men upon Himself, and distinguishes Himself from all who came before Him. . . . He yet with evident care draws the new out of the old, and fits it on to the old. He delineated His own mission as a climax in a long appeal of God to Israel (Matt. xxi. 33-38), and the opposition to Him and His, as a chapter of *dénouement* in the history of an old conflict between God and the ungodly (Matt. v. 12, xxiii. 30-37). He sees a 'necessity' for the happening of things to fulfil what had been said of old (Mark xiv. 49; Luke xxii. 37). The very pith of the disciples' ignorance is their failure to see how the features of His work and character had been traced beforehand, and the supreme teaching which they receive from Him is that which discloses His correspondence to the whole tenor of the Scriptures of the past (Luke xxiv. 25, 26, 44)." <sup>1</sup>

Without dispute, the most critical epoch in the early history

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Talbot, *Lux' Mundi*, "Preparation for Christ in History," p. 132.

of the Church previous to the outbreak of the Arian controversy was that of its conflict with Gnosticism. This struggle may be typically studied in the history of Marcion, whose opinions distracted the Church in the middle of the second century. Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament was recognised by the Fathers as an attack on the very citadel of the Faith; the preparation for Christ in the Old Testament was rightly seen to be not only indispensable from an evidential point of view, but also a truth that admitted of no reasonable doubt.<sup>1</sup> This conviction has never been more forcibly expressed than in St. Augustine's aphorism, "*Novum testamentum in vetere latet, vetus in novo patet.*" So striking, indeed, is the connection between the Old Testament and the original records of Christianity that a whole school of negative critics has found in type and prophecy the material from which the primitive Church constructed its transcendental Christ.<sup>2</sup> Without pausing to demonstrate the weakness of this position, it may be pointed out that such a contention greatly helps to establish the preparatory mission of the Old Testament.

In dealing with the question of the organic relation of the two Testaments, it is important to bear in mind the previous mental attitude of the first converts to Christianity. The Jew was, before and above everything else, a monotheist; "for centuries the unity of God had been burnt into the consciousness of Israel." The very fact, therefore, that St. Paul and others, trained as they had been in the ancient Scriptures, acknowledged the Divinity of Christ is conclusive proof, not only that they found in the Incarnation no contradiction to their ancestral faith, but, on the contrary, its fulfilment—God having provided some better thing for them (Heb. xi. 40). Such was their attachment to the Law and the Prophets that, had they failed to find in them unequivocal preparation for Christ, they would have turned with invincible

<sup>1</sup> On the importance of the Church's decision in the Marcion controversy, see Burkitt, *Transmission of the Gospels*, p. 307 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Criticism furnishes few better examples of inconsistency, amounting to self-contradiction, than the attempt made, on the other hand, by some writers to discredit, minimise, even eliminate, the preparatory elements of the Old Testament.

prejudice from the message of Christianity. The transition from Judaism to Christianity would be an insoluble problem but for the prophetic character of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> It is clear, however, from their writings, that the Apostles did find this preparation; and if, in any valid sense, the Old Testament was the precursor of the New, it is equally clear that it must have prepared the way for that which is the central truth of Gospels and Epistles alike. Had it failed in this respect, it would have failed to prepare the way for Christianity as taught from the first, and as it has come down to us. And, conversely, to deny the doctrine of the Incarnation is virtually to deny the preparatory nature of the Old Testament.

From every point of view the incompleteness of the Old Testament apart from the New can be shown. On the other hand, the two Testaments with their vital relation to each other are a striking example of fulfilment and completion. It was not without profound significance that Lord Beaconsfield, who by temperament was more than reticent on matters of religion, whilst conforming, as a communicant, to Church order, described himself as a "complete Jew."<sup>2</sup> He realised the incompleteness of the Old Testament apart from the New. Intellectually, at least, he was convinced that Christian theism had its roots in Jewish theism, that Jesus Christ was the matured fruit of God's spiritual dealings with man, that He at once fulfilled and transcended the Messianic conceptions of the prophets. So clearly, indeed, is the truth of the Incarnation foreshadowed in the Old Testament that to deny that truth is to stultify the most significant portions of the Jewish Scriptures.

It is possible, doubtless, honestly to dispute what has been obvious to the Christian consciousness for nearly two thousand years; but if, with the greatest religious thinkers, past and present, we believe that the Jewish nation was, in a special sense, the depositary and channel of the Divine teaching, reason will surely bring us one step further, and we shall see

<sup>1</sup> See Lucas, *The Fifth Gospel*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> "The professed creed of Disraeli was that of a 'complete Jew'—that is to say, he believed in 'Him that had come,' and 'did not look for another.' To use his own words, he 'believed in Calvary as well as Sinai.'"—Sir W. Fraser, *Disraeli and his Day*, p. 189.

revelation taking fuller and riper shape in Christianity. With the Bible in our hands, and the history of the Church before us, shall we not find it easier to accept than dispute the contention of the apostle Peter, that all the prophets, from Samuel onwards, foretold the days of the Messiah? Shall we not be ready with St. Paul to prove from the Scriptures that "this is the very Christ"?

## CHAPTER IV

### GOD AND MAN REVEALED IN THE INCARNATION

THE subject of this chapter has already come before us impressively, if indirectly, in the preparation in history for Christ. The fact of preparation testifies to the fact of need. Further, this preparation is a witness from the side of God and man alike. On the human side it means that the world was waiting and longing for what it did not possess—not even in the prophetic teaching and the pure monotheism of Israel, much less in those guesses at truth and gropings after a fuller conception of the Divine that we meet with in pagan thought and worship. On the Divine side it was an educational process on the lines of evolution, a process by which the imperfect, deeply sensible of its defects, was being drawn on towards perfection. "As a general thing, in the whole history of evolution, when you see any internal adjustment reaching out toward something, it is in order to adapt itself to something that really exists; and if the religious cravings of man constitute an exception, they are the one thing in the whole process of evolution that is exceptional and different from all the rest."<sup>1</sup>

If, then, we are fully persuaded that, in any true sense, the New Testament is the complement and consummation of the Old, and that Christianity crowns and rationalises every previous effort of the Spirit, whether in the world of Jew or Gentile, we find in the history of religious thought an illustra-

<sup>1</sup> Fiske, *A Century of Science*, p. 115.



tion of a principle familiar to every student of the natural world. "Hunger in nature is always prophetic:" needs felt and expressed will be satisfied. Aristotle long ago perceived that there was a perfecting principle at work in the universe. "Nature, give her time, will fulfil her whole law of perfection."<sup>1</sup> The same teleological law finds expression in the moral and spiritual world. Nothing short of perfection satisfies. The human spirit presses on from point to point until that which is perfect is come. And it is in Jesus Christ that it finds that which is perfect—finds, therefore, that by which its need is supplied. To the student of history who accepts the hypothesis of Divine purpose and agency, the Incarnation presents itself as a fitting climax to a long course of spiritual development and progressive revelation.<sup>2</sup>

What we propose to do in this and the following chapter is to show wherein the need of the Incarnation consisted. What was it in man that demanded this great mystery of God manifest in the flesh? How, in what specific ways, was human need supplied by the Son of God taking upon Him our nature? The need of man, in one word, was mediation; the work of Christ is that of Mediator. The life of man, as a spiritual being is, from first to last, a mediated life, a life mediated through the Incarnate Son of God. This mediatorial work of Christ may be considered under the two categories of *knowledge* and *union*. It is with the former of these that the present chapter will attempt to deal.

Man's knowledge of God, and of himself as related to God, is the subject of revelation—a progressive revelation that culminated in the coming of the Son of God in our nature. By the Incarnate Christ has been supplied this fundamental need of *knowledge*; through Him has been declared what God is and what man ought to be. "Jesus Christ is not only the revelation of Godhead—He is also the revelation of manhood."<sup>3</sup>

First, then, through the incarnate life of His Son God has

<sup>1</sup> Newman Smyth, *Through Science to Faith*, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> On this important subject, see Gore, *u.s.*, p. 32 ff.; Ottley, *u.s.*, p. 12 ff.; Illingworth, *u.s.*, pp. vi., vii., 77 ff.; Griffith-Jones, *Ascent through Christ*, p. 307 ff.; Masterman, *Was Jesus Christ Divine?* p. 27 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 142.

revealed Himself. By the light of nature we may know that God exists; but this is as far as possible from the knowledge of God. This knowledge can be ours only through revelation. It was given to us when "the Word became flesh." Constituted as we are, it is difficult to see how a revelation of God to man could be made except through persons, and persons who can make themselves fully intelligible to the faculties of man. If this be so, a perfect revelation must be mediated through an ideal person. This is what the Christian claims to have been vouchsafed in Jesus Christ. "If we are not to worship the ideal Man, what are we to worship? . . . The unknown God, the Absolute, the Monad must ever escape us."<sup>1</sup>

As the world has advanced in knowledge, whether scientific or speculative, it has realised with increasing force its impotence to form any definite intellectual conception of Deity. The clearer the mental vision, the more overpowering the sense of insufficiency when dealing with the infinite and absolute. We are thus led to the conclusion that if we are to possess any real knowledge of Him who filleth all things, it must be brought to us in a concrete form; in other words, it must come to us through human life. The Divine Word for which Plato yearned could only reach man through man. Every true human life is, in its measure, a revelation of the Divine; a perfectly true human life is the most perfect revelation of the Divine of which man, with his present faculties, is capable. That perfectly true life is before us in the Gospels. From it the world has learned all that it really knows of the God who made it. When mysticism in its passionate efforts to attain to knowledge of and union with God, has depreciated or obscured the truth of the Incarnation, it has inevitably, albeit unconsciously, entered on the path of negation.<sup>2</sup> Our knowledge of God is bound up with our knowledge of Christ. "We are to contemplate Christ, that human character, so profound, yet so intelligible, its methods, its motives, its principles—and we are to know that it is not the character of any mere creature, but of God Himself. . . . We have in Jesus Christ a

<sup>1</sup> Inge, *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 63. Cp. Westcott, "Christianity as the Absolute Religion," *Religious Thought in the West*, p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> See Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, pp. 56, 57.

real knowledge of God expressed in terms of humanity;"<sup>1</sup> a humanity which "reflected, without refracting, the Divine Being whose organ it was made."<sup>2</sup>

Christ, in the life that He lived, the death that He died, the works that He wrought, the words that He spake as recorded by the Evangelists, gave to the world a conception of God, which brought Him near to heart and conscience in a degree incomparably higher than any other religious teacher before or since. That conception of God was rooted in the theism of the Old Testament, but we only have to set the Gospels beside the writings of Isaiah and the Psalmists to see at what an immeasurable distance all previous knowledge had been left behind. It was, as we learn from history, a conception which not only satisfied the mind of the unlearned, but dethroned the subtleties and speculations of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> No thinkers have more fully faced the mysteries of life and the universe than many of the early Christian writers. They grappled with questions that exercised the minds of Aristotle and Plato, Seneca and Plotinus. They were well acquainted both with the philosophies and religions of the world, and they found their object of worship in Jesus Christ. Irenæus, "the first systematic theologian,"<sup>4</sup> quoting from some unknown author, says, "He spoke well who said that the infinite (*immensum*) Father is measured (*mensuratum*) in the Son: mensura enim Patris Filius."<sup>5</sup> Origen, the greatest thinker of the Church of the Fathers, making a distinction between the incommunicable and the communicable, taught that all that was communicable was to be found in the incarnate Son. The world, too, found its object of worship in Him of whom St. John wrote, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him,"—in Him who, in the spirit of prophecy, declared, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." The world turned from dumb idols to the Christ of the Gospels, because it saw in Him a vision of the Divine, which elsewhere it failed to find. In that vision the world learned that God is love.<sup>6</sup> The heart was satisfied in

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, pp. 114, 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> And see chap. viii.

<sup>4</sup> Bigg, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> Iren., *Contra Hæret.*, iv. 6. See Inge, *u.s.*, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 120.

Christ because it found in Him a God who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."<sup>1</sup> We cannot read the Epistles without recognising the fact that the first-century writers were as fully convinced as Athanasius himself that God had revealed Himself in His Son—that Jesus Christ was very God as well as very Man. To the Church from the first He has been the Incarnate Word. "In all things He was the speech of God to men—no mere Giver or mere Gift, but the supreme Revealer—the Way and the Truth, in short, as well as the Life."<sup>2</sup>

We now turn to the other side of the revelation vouchsafed in Christ, namely, the ideal Man. Man, to be equipped for his vocation, must have a knowledge not only of the true God, but also of his true self. In Christ he finds it. "Jesus so lived that He seemed to men the ethical perfection of God embodied in an ideally perfect manhood."<sup>3</sup> We have already spoken of Christ as an object of worship in His ideal humanity, and this, because in His life and character we see, undimmed by frailty, unclouded by sin, the perfect expression of the Divine holiness. And if man, as the Bible teaches, is made in the image of God, it follows that he only so far fulfils his destiny as he approximates to the ideal. It has been truly said, "We love the character of our Lord because it is our ideal self."<sup>4</sup> God has put our duty before us in a perfect character. That character is an appeal to which every one who has not wholly lost the image of God can respond; it requires no dialectical power, no keenness of intellect to apprehend it; it is an appeal to all sorts and conditions of men. "The vast majority of men are utterly unable to understand an argument: all can appreciate a character."<sup>5</sup> It is thus that God has dealt with man—

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds."

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<sup>1</sup> "No doctrine of the Incarnation is adequate to the task of comforting the broken heart of humanity that does not offer us a human heart, which is exactly the Heart of God Himself."—Weston, *The One Christ*, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Hort, *The Way, the Truth, the Life*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup> Canon Wilson, *Cambridge Theological Essays*, p. 254; and see Westcott, *Christus Consummator*, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> W. S. Lilly, *On Shibboleths*, p. 44.



Our Lord, throughout His teaching, assumes man's affinity to God. To Him the "image of God" was no mere figure of speech, but a sublime fact. It is His starting-point for dealing with the human heart. He brings men a message from their Father in heaven; from the very constitution of their nature, He takes it for granted that they are capable not only of understanding the message He has brought, but also of reproducing the character and reflecting the glory of Him who sent it: "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

Nor did our Lord hesitate to proclaim Himself the pattern of those whom He taught. They were to learn of Him (Matt. xi. 29); He gave them an example (John xiii. 15). In coming, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, He was showing them what their life ought to be (Matt. xx. 26 ff.). The testimony twice given from heaven (Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5) corresponded with the inner consciousness of the Son of Man Himself; His life was one of unbroken well-pleasing to the Father (John viii. 29). No one could convict Him of sin (John viii. 46). The disciples' experience confirmed the Master's word. They who companied with Him day by day could find no fault in Him; more and more it became their conviction, more and more a part of their faith, that in His presence they were face to face with a sinless life.

With the picture of that life before them in the Gospels sixty generations have confirmed this estimate; "They" (the Gospels) "have acted as the frame to a picture of moral loveliness that never grows old."<sup>1</sup> The world has vied with the Church in expressions of reverent admiration and homage. Did space permit, we might quote the testimony of Rousseau, Goethe, Renan, Strauss, Victor Hugo, John Stuart Mill, Seeley, Martineau, with a host of others, whose bias was far from being in the direction of orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that the all but universal verdict of many centuries is rudely challenged in our own day; but this, be it remembered, chiefly, if not exclusively, by those who would revolutionise the standard of moral judgment, and place life on a

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> See Ballárd, *Miracles of Unbelief*, p. 250 ff.

secular basis. To the secularist who denies the existence of God—even to the consistent agnostic, whose possible God is unknowable, and therefore a negligible factor—the Life which, of all lives, was most centred in God, must appear one of delusion and failure. And if materialism and agnosticism (which God forbid!) are to dominate the thought of the future, then the influence and power of Christ are destined to decay, for He Himself will have become an anachronism. With such a consummation (if we may dare to call it such) the present unsettlement of faith sometimes seems to threaten us. Yet, if history teaches anything, it is that unsettlement does not end in agnosticism, much less in atheism.<sup>1</sup> At the very time that Christ was preaching in Galilee the Stoic was deserting his materialistic basis of thought to feel his way in the direction of theism; while outside the range of philosophic teaching, superstition in many forms was rampant. In three centuries from that time Stoicism had long been defunct, the superstitions had well nigh run their course, and Christian theism was in the full career of conquest. To turn to later times—it is likely enough that the writers who represent the spirit of the Renaissance were fully persuaded that the age of faith was left behind, and that an epoch of godless reason had opened. But they were wrong, and some of them lived to know it. The old classical world of ancient pagan thought had, it is true, risen from the dead, but “had risen with the New Testament in her hand.” Later still the encyclopedists could persuade themselves that religion had only been resuscitated in the sixteenth century to be put to death and buried in the eighteenth. How great was their mistake history did not take long to show.

The very fact that the unsettlement of the present time finds expression in Christian science, esoteric Buddhism, theosophy, spiritualism, and many other modes of religious experience and belief, is itself a proof that the teaching of negation and materialism cannot satisfy. And just as the general unsettlement in questions of religion testified, at the beginning of the Christian era, to hopes, yearnings, intuitions, which at last found their solution and satisfaction in Christ,

<sup>1</sup> See Gwatkin, *u.s.*, i. p. 294.

so we may believe that the various and contradictory religious movements of to-day are an indication that what the world is waiting for is a purer Christianity than the Church now presents, or, indeed, since apostolic days, ever has presented.

"The Evangelists may be said to have conceived the essence of Christ's person to be its spiritual transcendence, and in this they but anticipated the mind of Christendom."<sup>1</sup> We may trust the verdict of the centuries and our own experience. This spiritual transcendence is to the secularist of all time an offence—to the heart that hungers after righteousness it is its own guarantee of truth. In Christ alone is found the realisation of Lord Bacon's idea of heaven upon earth—"It is heaven upon earth when a man's mind rests on Providence, moves in charity, and turns upon the poles of truth." The human figure that has drawn generation after generation to itself, the human character which, as portrayed by the Evangelists, made the imitation of Christ a universally recognised duty—the human life which raised the standard of conduct to a level never dreamed of in earlier ages—these, surely, have set the type for all time, and nothing but grievous loss and hopeless confusion could come of setting that type aside as worn out and obsolete. "The type of character set forth in the gospel history is an absolute embodiment of Love, both in the way of action and affection, crowned by the highest possible exhibition of it in an act of the most transcendent self-devotion to the interest of the human race. This being the case, it is difficult to see how the Christian morality can ever be brought into antagonism with the moral progress of mankind, or how the Christian type of character can ever be left behind in the course of human development, lose the allegiance of the moral world, or give place to a newly emerging and higher ideal. This type, it would appear, being perfect, will be final. . . . Humanity, as it passes through phase after phase of the historical development, may advance indefinitely in excellence, but its advance will be an indefinite approximation to the Christian type."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> Goldwin Smith. See Westcott's *Historic Faith*, pp. 229, 230.

## CHAPTER V

UNION OF GOD AND MAN THROUGH  
THE INCARNATION

WE now turn to the other aspect of Christ's mediatorial work, and contemplate Him as the living Medium of that union between God and man which is the fundamental aim of all religion worthy of the name—above all of revealed religion, the religion of the Bible.

It has been a subject of keen debate whether the Incarnation was the eternal and original purpose of God, apart from the entrance of sin into the world, or whether it should be viewed as the outcome of what we term the Fall.<sup>1</sup> On such a question it is impossible to speak with certainty. In the absence of any express word of revelation, the subject can never be brought out of the region of speculation into that of dogma. This, however, may safely be affirmed, namely, that the leaning of the modern mind is to regard the Incarnation as the natural and necessary crown and goal of creation. An age whose thought has been so profoundly affected by the hypothesis of evolution is irresistibly led to see in the Man Christ Jesus the fulfilment of an eternal purpose. Experimental religion, too, leads in the same direction. When we reflect how our knowledge of things spiritual is bound up with our knowledge of Christ, the question forces itself upon the mind, How could God's full and final disclosure of Himself and His will have been given except through the Incarnation? Apart from Christ, all definite conception of God vanishes from our mental and spiritual horizon; "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten from the Father." So, likewise, when we think to what an extent our views of truth and duty are traced to the life that was lived in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago, our minds are powerfully drawn to the same conclusion. Our practical ideal is so inseparably associated with the life of the Son of Man, that it is difficult,

<sup>1</sup> The subject did not come forward for definite discussion until early in the thirteenth century.



if not impossible, to conceive of a full revelation of the Divine will apart from the Word incarnate. From every point of view, the Divine and transcendental, as a matter of experience, is so essentially mediated through Jesus Christ, that we fail to realise how the highest union with God of which man is capable could be effected save through the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup>

The language of our Lord does not decide this deeply interesting question, but nothing could be more direct and explicit than His teaching (especially in the fourth Gospel) in respect of eternal life as God's gift to man in Himself. The declaration at Capernaum concerning the Bread of life, the words spoken to Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria, the Parable of the Vine and the Branches, together with the whole discourse of which that similitude is part, besides many other portions of the Gospel, suggest themselves as expressing this truth. Yet, whilst admitting that St. John is the most insistent of the Evangelists upon this point, it must not be forgotten that the clearest proof of this mediated life is supplied by the Synoptists. Never did our Lord more plainly assert that that knowledge which is eternal life is mediated through Himself than when, according to St. Matthew, He said, "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father; and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him;"<sup>2</sup> and here we have an obvious link with the thought of the fourth Gospel. But proof still more cogent of this fundamental position is found

<sup>1</sup> For an admirable summary of the history of this subject see Bishop Westcott, *The Gospel of Creation*, "Epistles of St. John," p. 273 ff., where the view that the Incarnation is independent of the Fall is strongly supported; see also *Christus Consummator*, p. 100 ff., by the same writer; Fairbairn, *Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 477; Illingworth, *Lux Mundi*, p. 186, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 204; Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 521 ff. The question may present itself, why the Incarnation should have taken place and the model life lived so late in the history of the race. The point is effectively dealt with in Dr. Griffith-Jones's *Ascent through Christ*, p. 320. The argument is an expansion of Dr. Ottley's pregnant words, "A premature revelation might have been useless or even dangerous."—*u.s.*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 27. Cp. Luke x. 23.

in the Christian sacraments, the institution of which is recorded, not by St. John,<sup>1</sup> but by the Synoptists. It is impossible to discuss the point, but, that life in and through Christ is of the very essence of sacramental truth cannot be disputed. When men were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,<sup>2</sup> they fully understood that it was through Him that they entered into the kingdom of their Father; when they partook of the consecrated elements, it was in full view of St. Paul's teaching, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?"<sup>3</sup> The life that they lived in the flesh they lived in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Church set the seal of spiritual experience to the declaration of her Lord, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."<sup>5</sup>

After all, the question whether the promise of the Incarnation was involved in the creation of man in God's image, irrespective of the Fall, is, from a practical point of view, not a crucial one. As a matter of fact, we have to consider the Incarnation from the standpoint of man's sinful and corrupt nature. Union with God, as we have already urged, is the fundamental aim of religion. But from the time that the ethical character of God began to be apprehended, and a sense of sin, as a consequence of that apprehension, entered into the religious consciousness, religion was a matter of *re-union* as well as union—indeed of *re-union* before and above everything else. When once that sense of sin has arisen, no religious system can satisfy that ignores the need of reconciliation. The revelation of Old and New Testament alike is a revelation of the Divine righteousness, therefore, by way of contrast, of man's unrighteousness; and since no other ethical conception of God can be compared for purity and sublimity with that presented in the Bible, so no other religion insists so strongly as that of the Bible on the gulf that separates God and man—the estrangement of the created

<sup>1</sup> We can, however, hardly miss a reference to the two sacraments in John iii. 5 and vi. 51 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 38, xxii. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. x. 16.

<sup>5</sup> John x. 10.

from the Creator. Christianity would never have supplied the spiritual wants of the world had it made no provision for the fundamental need of reconciliation.

This provision was made in the Incarnation. The first thing that strikes one in studying the more doctrinal parts of the New Testament is this—that whilst never forgetting or ignoring the true humanity of our Lord, the writers fully realised and taught that the salvation of the world could only be effectually wrought by One who is truly and essentially Divine. Nor was the thought of union with God ever dissociated from that of reconciliation. Take, for example, what may perhaps be regarded as the cardinal passage on this subject, Col. i. 12–22. Here the Apostle asserts the cosmic significance of the Incarnation as effecting both union and reunion of creature and Creator. He is dealing, it would appear, with an incipient Gnosticism, which Bishop Lightfoot believes to have grafted itself in that part of Asia Minor upon an Essenic form of Judaism.<sup>1</sup> Hence the free use of Gnostic terms. These he advisedly adopts with the aim of bringing out the contrast between Gnosticism and Christianity. The former had its own conception of mediatorial functions; not, however, through one Divine Mediator, but through many created intermediaries. The doctrine of Christ, on the contrary, he urges, is that of one Mediator, and that Mediator essentially Divine. The mediatorial beings of Gnostic belief were of diverse power, their power varying according to the degree of their relation to the *pleroma*, i.e. God in the fulness of His being; it was through them that the Eternal, the Absolute, might be approached. In direct contrast with this, St. Paul teaches that there is one Mediator, Himself God as well as Man.<sup>2</sup>

In the passage under consideration, St. Paul lays the strongest possible stress upon the work of reconciliation accomplished by the Word made flesh. He is face to face with the need felt by man ever since his conception of God

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hort disputes this conclusion; *Judaistic Christianity*, p. 128 ff. At the same time it can hardly be denied that St. Paul makes liberal use of Gnostic terminology. But see Lightfoot's *Commentary on Colossians*, p. 98 ff.; also comments *in loc.*, p. 150 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot, *u.s.*, p. 101.

rendered him conscious of sin—a need which he knows has now, in the fulness of time, been supplied by the Gospel of the Incarnation and the Cross. We have seen how this need was realised, and typically dealt with by the Jew; how, further, it was expressed in every part of the Gentile world by the institution of sacrifice. The New Testament sets forth the true provision for this need. History bears conclusive witness to the subjective efficacy of the provision. Wherever the teaching of the Gospel was accepted, there animal sacrifice, whether human or otherwise, was abandoned. The famous letter from the younger Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, early in the second century, testifies to the rapidly growing discontinuance of sacrifice in the province of Bithynia.<sup>1</sup> A similar report might have been made from other parts of the world.

Had this result of the preaching of Christ and Him crucified any basis of objective fact, or did it represent a purely subjective process of thought and practice, rooted, not in fact, but in delusion? In other words, were the sense of alienation from God and the Christian doctrine of reconciliation equally the work of human imagination, or was the alienation a fact, met and overcome by the incarnate Son of God?

It must be carefully borne in mind that, throughout the apostolic writings, Jesus Christ is set forth as a Redeemer, making reconciliation, bringing about a reunion between God and man. His death, consummating a life of sinless obedience to the Divine will, is represented as removing the barrier that separated man from God. We may appeal to St. Paul, who declares Christ to be our Passover sacrificed for us (1 Cor. v. 7), or to St. Peter, who speaks of the Blood of Christ as that of a Lamb without blemish (1 Pet. i. 19), or to St. John, who points to Christ as the propitiation for the sin of the world (1 John ii. 2), or to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who affirms that Christ was “manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. ix. 26); the language is uniformly sacrificial, the meaning substantially the same—namely, that our Lord made His life an offering to God in respect of sin, that His death was propitiatory in the all-important sense

<sup>1</sup> On the profound significance of this letter and the Emperor's rescript, see Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 195, 198 ff.

that it removed that which, on our part, stood in the way of restoration to the favour of God. "God," says St. Paul, "was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself;" and he adds these significant words, "not reckoning unto them their trespasses" (2 Cor. v. 19). Their trespasses were the cause of estrangement; that cause had been removed by the sacrificial death of Christ.

Equally careful must we be to remember that, while thus insisting upon the objective aspect of Christ's death, the New Testament gives no support to the idea (so mischievous in the history of religious thought) that God required to be propitiated. On the contrary, God is represented as taking the initiative—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John iii. 16); "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith, by His blood" (Rom. iii. 24, 25).

The Incarnation, apart from the Atonement, would have been very far from fully meeting the spiritual needs of the world. Deep and true was the sense of sin in psalmist and prophet—still deeper and truer in those who accepted the teaching of Christ, since the sense of sin is proportionate to the knowledge of God; and when the world saw the ideal Manhood in Christ, the sense of sin was brought home with a power of conviction which the Old Testament saint had never experienced.

One to whom the Church of our time is deeply indebted says, "I feel as if the intellect, in analytically handling the Passion, tends to become little else than profane."<sup>1</sup> In approaching the subject of Christ's reconciling work one hears the echo of such words in one's own heart; yet how is it possible to treat of the Incarnation without touching on this mystery? Every attempt to fathom it has failed, and must fail, for the simple reason that the finite human intellect is incapable of fully grasping it. "To understand fully the Atonement were to understand these three things and their ultimate relation to each other—the greatest thing in God, which is His love; the strongest thing in the universe, which

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 432.



is law ; and the darkest thing in man, which is sin.”<sup>1</sup> There are few clearer proofs of the inspiration of the New Testament than the fact that it attempts no detailed explanation of that which it puts in the forefront of its teaching, viz. the atoning work of our Lord. The rationale of that work which satisfied the Church in the days of Irenæus and Origen failed to satisfy those who came after. Great as Anselm was, both as thinker and theologian, his revised theory of the Atonement was severely and justly criticised by his contemporaries. Luther and Calvin have had their day, and many later divines have wrestled with the problem without fully solving it. Yet, beneath opinions that vary from age to age, there is underlying truth. God’s truth fulfils itself in many ways. It does not follow that views which we cannot accept were false for those who held them ; “as real and living theories they did represent real aspects of the great reality. By their truth they lived. But by the incompleteness<sup>1</sup> of their truth, or the disproportional statement of it, they in time decayed.”<sup>2</sup>

Nor, whilst we must be content to leave much unexplained, can we forget that the heart of man is its own witness to the truth in question. “The heart,” in the familiar words of Pascal, “has reasons of its own.” The heart, that is, the spiritual consciousness, independent of analytical processes of thought, burdened, tormented by a sense of estrangement from God, finds in Christ and His work its relief and satisfaction. Long before men reasoned deeply on the subject, the fact of estrangement was recognised and the need of reconciliation expressed in the sacrifices of primitive man ; and after all that can be urged by modern thought against the doctrine of the Atonement, the heart, which alone knoweth its own bitterness and its own wants, finds its way to the Cross of Christ and there lays down the burden of sin.

The work, then, of Christ was a work of reconciliation ; but this only in virtue of His incarnation. The representative character of our Lord’s humanity is one of the key-thoughts of New Testament teaching. The same may be said of the patristic writings. Athanasius, who, more than any other

<sup>1</sup> Carnegie Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, p. x.

individual, formulated for the Church the doctrine of the Incarnation, lays great stress on the representative aspect of Christ's humanity. "By the incarnation the Son of God has been made, not a man, but Man."<sup>1</sup> In Him all men potentially live and act. Thus St. Paul claims for himself, as for every faithful member of the Church, that he died on the Cross with Christ; "We thus judge; that one died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. v. 14). So, too, his life is bound up with Christ; in Him he lives and moves and has his being (Gal. ii. 20; Phil. i. 21; Col. ii. 6, 7, iii. 1-4). And he was led to see that this union with Christ is universal in its range, a position waiting to be claimed and enjoyed by all men (Eph. ii. 11 ff., iii. 6 ff.). "St. Paul conceives man as a unity, and this unity as impersonated and realised in Christ"<sup>2</sup>

Now, when we read the Gospels as they stand, nothing is clearer than our Lord's profound conviction that He was acting for, on behalf of, man, as the divinely given, all-embracing Representative of the race. If the Gospels present a trustworthy portrait of Christ, it is quite certain that He saw His own person foreshadowed, His own work foretold, in that part of Isaiah's prophecy which unfolds the mission of Jehovah's Servant. In that section of the Book something more than hints and foregleams are given of the Incarnation in what has been termed the "Passion of God";<sup>3</sup>—Jehovah suffering, now in His own Person, now in that of His Servant, in, with, for His people—labouring, contending, agonising for their welfare—not only yearning over His rebellious and ungrateful children, but devoting Himself to their service, throwing Himself into the breach their sin had made, identifying Himself with them in their self-caused ruin, as one who was bound to them by ties that could not be broken. Nor was the work of Jehovah's Servant confined to the Jewish nation. The kingdom of the coming Christ was to embrace the world—"I will give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that

<sup>1</sup> Peile, *The Reproach of the Gospel*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 507.

<sup>3</sup> "Theology has no falsier idea than the impassibility of God."—Fairbairn, *Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 483. On the Passion of God, see Prof. G. Adam Smith, *Isaiah*, vol. ii. p. 132 ff.; also, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 174 ff.

Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah xlix. 6).

To those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind the Incarnation is the natural issue of the Divine character as portrayed by the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. Only when "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" was the full significance of Isaiah's words revealed. The very anthropomorphism of the prophet's language, startling as it sometimes is, finds its justification in the title the Lord chose for Himself, The Son of Man, a title by which He "at once identified Himself with all humanity and distinguished Himself from it."<sup>1</sup> The Incarnation was the mature expression in the fulness of time of the truth that "God is love"—a truth which by implication carries with it the Divine Passion; for what is love without self-imposed pain and sacrifice?

It can hardly escape our notice that He who entered with such unfathomable sympathy into the suffering and sorrow of the world found, apparently, in that suffering and sorrow no such stumbling-block to faith as we are apt to find—no hindrance to perfect trust in the wisdom and goodness of God. Never, so far as we may infer, was He haunted, like the writer of the Book of Job, by a harrowing sense of Divine injustice; never, like Habakkuk, was He tempted to reproach God with the wrongs of a disordered world. How was it that neither the world's sorrow nor His own ever shook the steadfastness of His trust? Such implicit trust, such intuitive confidence combined with such infinite compassion, would surely be the property of the Divine love incarnate, of God Self-identified with suffering humanity, and, as we cannot but think, of no other possible experience. Christ knew then, as the Church subsequently learned, that through His union with the race of man, the pains and penalties of sin—sin in which He had no personal share—became the travailing pangs of the new creation: "A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow because her hour is come: but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for the joy that a man is born into the

<sup>1</sup> Du Bose, *The Gospel in the Gospels*, p. 51.

world" (John xvi. 21). It was with this belief that St. Paul faced the problem of a world's suffering: man has been made joint-heir with Christ; Christ, the eternal Son, has become partaker of our nature—thus making us heirs of God, joint-heirs with Himself. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," but it is a pain which God, in the person of the Incarnate Son, is sharing; so is it the travailing pain that shall issue in a regenerate world; "if so be that we suffer with Him that we may be also glorified with Him" (Rom. viii. 17).<sup>1</sup>

It is as we thus enter into the truth of Christ's Self-identification with a sinful world that His work of reconciliation becomes real to us. In some actual and fundamental, though to us inexplicable, way, the Divine Saviour so united Himself with the sinful race of man that He bare in His own body, in His own personal experience, not only the weight of its sorrow, but also the weight, though not the guilt, of its sin.

The principle of vicarious suffering and agency, which is so universal that we may not unreasonably regard it as a cosmic law, is not suspended when we enter the region of the fact and consciousness of sin; nor is it difficult to distinguish between penitential consciousness and the penitence of guilt. We can see the distinction in the story of Israel's saints. It is mainly a vicarious consciousness of sin that is expressed in the penitential outpourings of such men as Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah. Here were men of pure, exemplary life, yet so identifying themselves with the sin, the idolatry, the rebellion that brought disgrace and exile on their people that they well nigh confess the sin of the nation as if it were their own. In the ardour of their patriotism they lose count of their individuality, and merge it in the corporate life of their fellow-countrymen. It is, indeed, comparing great things with small, and we fully admit that "there can be no illustrations of the Atonement;"<sup>2</sup> but such an attitude of soul seems to throw a ray of light upon the great mystery of the Passion, the

<sup>1</sup> On the significance of the Incarnation in regard to the whole subject of suffering, see Masterman, *Was Jesus Christ Divine?* p. 43 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Carnegie Simpson, *u.s.*, p. 167.

mystery of our Lord's redemptive relation to the sin of man. Sinless Himself, yet crushed beneath the sense and weight of a world's sin, He felt, as none other could, "all the sin of man with all the conscience of God."

And is not this the impression made upon our minds by the portrait of Christ in the Gospels? To some extent before the Transfiguration, but conspicuously from that crisis onwards, our Lord's mind was occupied with the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem. He was going thither to "give His life a ransom for many;" there was a baptism that He must be baptized with, a cup that He must drink, ere His mission upon earth was ended. The parables, and the teaching generally, of those closing days point with increasing emphasis to the tragic consummation of Calvary. Through Himself alone were men to come to the Father; the temple might be destroyed, and the world be no poorer, since He, not it, was the medium of worship.<sup>1</sup> The Apostles rightly interpreted the mind of their Master in assigning a perpetual and universal significance to the communion of His body and blood. As the grain of wheat finds its true purpose and destiny in the many grains that spring from it, so should He, in the self-extension of the Church, become a multitude which no man can number; and this through a death of agony and shame: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." Is it possible to interpret the agony in the Garden except by some such personal realisation of the sin from which He came to save as His representative humanity alone could experience? And His act, by faith in Him, becomes our act, His acknowledgment of sin our acknowledgment of sin, His death our death, His sacrifice our sacrifice. We admit that "vicarious penitence seems even less within the bounds of moral experience than vicarious punishment,"<sup>2</sup> but the penitential consciousness of the Head becomes, through faith, the consciousness of the member. We have to leave the mystery of the whole subject to a very great extent unsolved; but with St. Paul, we believe that God gave and

<sup>1</sup> There appear to be cogent reasons for assigning the words recorded in John ii. 19 to the latest period of our Lord's ministry.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop of Ossory, *Christianity and the Supernatural*, p. 81.



sent His Son to take our nature upon Him, and *in it* make atonement for us and our sins ; "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh " (Rom. viii. 3).

This is not the place to speak of spiritual experience, but it would be easy to show that the experience of the Church has exactly corresponded with the teaching of the New Testament. From the first, penitence has found its expression, its relief, its satisfaction in the Cross of Christ, because, with varying degrees of intelligence and apprehension, this fundamental truth has been grasped, namely, that the humanity of Christ is representative—identified with the race by nothing less than the Incarnation. "Christ offered the humanity which He had taken to Himself upon the altar of the Cross."<sup>1</sup> For that reason every member of the race may say with St. Paul, "I am crucified with Christ."

We have dealt with the reconciling work of Christ because, if, like the early Fathers, we base our belief in the Incarnation on the dogmatic statements of the New Testament, it is impossible to shelve the question as being immaterial to the faith of the Christian. For St. Paul, St. John, St. Peter, the Incarnation and the Atonement, as subjects of thought, were indivisible, and their belief is expressed in the creeds of Christendom. We have dealt with the question in some detail for two reasons; partly because in a world alienated from God by sin, the Atonement meets the deepest need of the human heart; partly because, to the educated religious consciousness of to-day, there is no part of the Christian faith that more urgently needs interpretation. We do not pretend to have handled the subject adequately, much less exhaustively, but we have endeavoured to treat it Scripturally, and to show that, when viewed in the light of apostolic teaching based upon the Self-interpretation of Christ, there is nothing in the belief of the Church that conflicts with the instinct of justice or with the claims of reason.

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *u.s.*, p. 51. And see the subject treated from this point of view by Carnegie Simpson, *u.s.*, p. 154 ff.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE INCARNATION POSTULATED IN THE GOSPELS

WE are warned by those well qualified to judge that "the doctrine of the Trinity is again likely to become the battleground that it has so often been before in Christian history."<sup>1</sup> This, in effect, is only another way of saying that the battle of faith centres in the question of the Incarnation, and in the Catholic view of the person of Christ. The subject of the Trinity can only be approached through that of the Incarnation. To believe intelligently in the Incarnation is virtually to accept the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> And if this is so—if, that is to say, the problem of the person of Christ is the central problem of Christianity, we may be sure that the conflict of faith will rage most fiercely round that Person as presented to our view in the Gospels. From the first it has been the conviction of the Church that in that portrait there is a blending of the human and Divine that is absolutely inexplicable except by the doctrine of the Incarnation, and that for this reason the devout study of the Gospels themselves furnishes the most cogent of all proofs in support of that truth. It is, therefore, a point of the very first importance that the presentation of Christ in these documents should command our implicit confidence.

It is a great step in this direction to be able to show, as we can almost to demonstration, that the Gospels give us the impression made by Christ upon contemporaries and personal associates. The time is long past when the Synoptics could, with any show of plausibility, be dated well on in the second century. It is now practically certain that they were written long before the end of the first, namely 65–80. That they contained what was taught and believed in the primitive Church may be assumed with certainty, since otherwise their authenticity must at once have been challenged. Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. v. Cp. Gwatkin, *u.s.*, ii. p. 29<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> To this the position of Swedenborg and his followers is an exception more apparent than real.

there is conclusive proof that the gospel which St. Paul received and preached was no other than that which has come down to us from the pen of the Evangelists.<sup>1</sup> The influence of St. Peter (many would maintain more than influence) upon the composition of the earliest of our Gospels, St. Mark, is hardly disputed. The fourth Gospel, whoever may have written it, contains overwhelming proof of its having been the work of an eye-witness. With scarcely less confidence we may believe that in the other Gospels we are listening to apostolic tradition in the strictest sense of the term. St. Matthew was not, as was long thought, the actual writer of our first Gospel in its entirety, but there is reason to believe that an important part of it came from his hand.<sup>2</sup> St. Luke is careful to assure his readers that they were receiving their instruction from first-hand authority (i. 1, 2). Both he and the compiler of the first Gospel were satisfied as to the truthfulness of St. Mark, incorporating the greater part of his work with their own. Nor must we forget that St. Luke was the travelling companion of St. Paul, who expressly tells us that he had compared his own teaching with that of the original apostles (Gal. i. 18, ii. 2, 9). The Church, then, received her knowledge of Christ from eye-witnesses, from men who were closely associated with our Lord in the days of His flesh,<sup>3</sup>—especially from those best qualified to speak, the chosen twelve,—according to the expressed intention of Christ Himself.<sup>4</sup> Independent of all this, we would add, are the internal proofs of authenticity—frequent and undeniable indications of the eye-witness, the perfectly truthful picture of the life, religious, social, political, of the period,—above all, the consistency and unity of the life and character of Jesus Christ Himself. Indeed, to one who should come without prejudice to their study, it would seem transparently clear that the Gospels are a record of first-hand impression.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See chapter viii.

<sup>2</sup> Namely the *logia* (sayings). The testimony of Papias to this effect is accepted by the majority of scholars.

<sup>3</sup> See Luke i. 2, Acts i. 21, 22.

<sup>4</sup> John xv. 27.

<sup>5</sup> On the presuppositions of rationalism and the inconsistencies of rationalistic interpretation, see Nolloth, *The Person of our Lord and Recent Thought*, p. 351 ff.

Looking now at the picture of Jesus Christ as presented by the Evangelists, we find that the Central Figure of the Gospels stands forth, not merely as lifted by word, by deed, by character, far above the ordinary level of humanity, but that there is claimed for Him a position unmistakably Divine.<sup>1</sup> In the first place, not only were they fully persuaded that during His ministry He had wrought many miracles, but that the element of miracle, which had attended His steps in Galilee and Judæa, reached a culminating point in His resurrection from the dead. Had the first disciples analysed the process by which they came to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God in an altogether unique sense, they would have ascribed a higher degree of importance to the Resurrection than to any other branch of evidence. The belief of the primitive Church in the Resurrection brings us, we need scarcely say, face to face with an acute controversy, rationalistic criticism confidently maintaining that the Apostles and others were victims of illusion. We must not pause to examine the evidence for the fact of the Resurrection, or attempt to show how the explanations of rationalism have been mutually exclusive, mutually destructive. But, bearing in mind the part that this belief has played in the establishment and spread of Christianity, we may well ask the question, which has, indeed, been asked from the first, whether it is reasonable to trace the birth of Christendom and the greatest movement in history to an hallucination on the part of a handful of Jews. Nor must we forget that, after all, the narratives of the Evangelists are not the most conclusive proof of the event. The most convincing argument for the Resurrection is to be found in the history of the Church. "The real historical evidence for the Resurrection is the fact that it was believed, preached, propagated, and produced its fruit and effect in the new phenomenon of the Christian Church long before any of our Gospels were written."<sup>2</sup>

It was, then, the unalterable conviction of those whose views and impressions have come down to us in the New

<sup>1</sup> The two next chapters will show that had it been otherwise, the views of the Evangelists would have violently clashed with the belief of the Church when they wrote.

<sup>2</sup> Denney, *Jesus and the Gospels*, p. III. Cp. Du Bose, *u.s.*, p. 200.

Testament that Jesus Christ had shown Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs. Back from that experience their mind would travel to many a miraculous work of mercy wrought by their Master as He went about doing good ; and this, at least, is certain—that their whole conception of Christ was associated with His miraculous power ; so that any attempt to eliminate miracle from the Gospels would leave both a record and a portrait mutilated almost beyond recognition. Those who insist upon a non-miraculous Christ may succeed in constructing what is to them an historical figure, but it is not the Christ of the only history that has come down to us—it is not the Christ of those who were eye-witnesses of His life.

But miracle was far from the only argument that appealed to the first witnesses of Christ and His kingdom. What but the complete indwelling of God could explain the life with which they had been brought into closest possible touch? Looking back upon it, they could call to mind no flaw, no imperfection. This argument is summed up by St. John in his first Epistle: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes . . . declare we unto you" (1 John i. 1, 3). "Ye know that He was manifested to take away sins, and in Him is no sin" (iii. 5). In the Incarnation St. John had found what, to his mind, was the only possible solution of a sinless life—a phenomenon which, to those who know the human heart, surely presents a greater miracle than any of those mighty works which drew the multitudes to the feet of Christ. These first witnesses had enjoyed every possible opportunity of knowing Him as very Man; the life they so reverently cherished in their memory was a complete one. They had been with Him in all the scenes and circumstances of daily life; they had known Him in the house—the house of feasting and the house of mourning; they had been His companions in the market-place and by the wayside—in the synagogue and in the temple; they had known Him face to face with multitudes in the plain—they had seen Him face to face with His Father on the mountain-top; they had known Him as son, as friend, as teacher; they had watched Him among those who loved Him, and among those who loved Him not;



they had known Him in life and known Him in death—and “in Him is no sin” was their deliberate verdict.

It is as such that He is represented in the Gospels. The Evangelists consciously drew the portrait of One in whom was no sin. It is St. John alone who records the actual challenge of Christ, “Which of you convicteth Me of sin?” But as we read the Synoptics, the challenge seems equally to proceed from them, for the portrait presented is of One who had no consciousness of sin. He searches the souls of others and shows them, with unerring penetration, the plague of their own heart, but never once betrays any sense of personal shortcoming. “A single doubt as to the sinlessness of Christ would have destroyed their confidence in Him as the Redeemer of the world. Unlike other founders of religion, His authority and work are inseparably bound up with His sinlessness.”<sup>1</sup> The more they thought upon that life the fuller was their belief that “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” He is the beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased; as such He stands before us from first to last in the Gospel narrative. What is this but to say that the Incarnation is postulated by the Evangelists?

And as they recalled the teaching that came from those sinless lips this faith would be confirmed. “Never man spake like this Man,” was the verdict of contemporaries, a verdict confirmed by the judgment of nineteen centuries. The profoundest moral truth, the highest spiritual mysteries, alike lay open to His perception, a perception which, as we read, strikes us as rather one of intuition than of mental or spiritual effort. As Pascal long ago remarked, “Jesus Christ speaks the greatest things so simply that it seems as if He had never thought upon them.” Even in “His own country,” where He met with least response and receptiveness, His words created as much astonishment as His works, “Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?” (Matt. xiii. 54).

Moreover, He taught as One whose word it was impossible to dispute. There is an assumption of infallibility when laying down moral principles, or dealing with the spiritual

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, u.s., i. p. 798.*

needs of man, which was as impressive to the first as it has been to succeeding generations, and which harmonises better with a belief in the Incarnation than with any other conception of our Lord's person. Apostles and disciples had listened to words from His mouth which sharply differentiated Him from every other religious teacher. They had heard Him abrogate portions of the Mosaic law and proclaim Himself the Mediator of a new covenant; they had heard a demand for service and allegiance in terms that no earthly monarch would employ; they had heard Him bid the weary and the heavy laden come to Him for rest; they had heard Him claim an absolutely unique relation to the Father—"All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father; and no one knoweth the Son save the Father, neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him" (Matt. xi. 27). They would remember that, when He spake of the Father, His filial consciousness did not allow Him to co-ordinate Himself with other men; by constantly using the expression "My Father," He claimed a position which He could not share with others, a position, moreover, which He also assigned to Himself in more than one of His parables. In their hearing He had thrown down the challenge to Pharisee and scribe by asserting His authority to forgive sin (Matt. ix. 2 ff.; Luke vii. 48). He had gone even further than this in His claim to the divine prerogative in respect of sin; for, in plain speech and parable alike, He declared Himself to be Judge of all men. Above and beyond all this, had He not made it unmistakably clear that He claimed to be the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy? Others might recognise the redemptive purpose that underlay the whole of the prophetic writings, but He sees Himself as the Redeemer, He recognises Himself in the Servant of the Lord, who occupies so conspicuous a place in the later portion of Isaiah's prophecy. He finds His own portrait in the fifty-third chapter of that book, and His own work of mediation in the vicarious sacrifice therein depicted. He gives His life a ransom for many; He establishes a new covenant in His own blood. He is brought as a Lamb to the slaughter, and dies a death which, even to the French freethinker,

was the death of a God. And if all this was not self-deception both on His part and theirs, on a scale that has no parallel, and to them would have been inconceivable, what more rational conclusion could they form than that the Incarnation of the Son of God was the true and only adequate fulfilment of Messianic prophecy?

And all this time we have drawn little of our material from the fourth Gospel. We have purposely kept this record of the Saviour's life and teaching in the background, not because we dispute either its genuineness or its authenticity, but partly because it was written considerably later than the Synoptics, and is therefore more open to attack from those who would account for the personality of Christ on mythical grounds—partly because its obvious aim is to prove as well as to proclaim the truth of the Incarnation. We have gone first to the Synoptists because they have given us the simple, one might almost say, unstudied, portrait of Christ.<sup>1</sup> In their writings we see just the reflection of contemporary Christian belief and nothing more—just the Gospel as it had been preached and received, apparently, from the day of Pentecost onwards. In saying this, we do not mean that the three synoptic records are without features of their own. These they have, and have been seen to have from the first. But, as contrasted with the fourth Gospel, they betray, to the impartial judgment, no tendency towards a formulated theology, no intention on the part of the writers beyond that of presenting a first-hand, living picture of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing, however, is further from our intention than to put the Gospel of St. John aside. Even if it is our belief that "the fourth Gospel is written in the language of the Evangelist rather than of Jesus,"<sup>3</sup> we do not question its authenticity, or

<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, especially true of St. Mark.

<sup>2</sup> The contention of the Tübingen school that the Synoptics were composed in support of certain tendencies of theological thought, although recently revived by Abbé Loisy, has been generally abandoned, and it is now admitted, even by rationalistic writers, that there was no intentional colouring of the contents. As a matter of fact, they are conspicuously free from the theological conceptions and definitions current in the Church when they were written. See Sanday, *Bampton Lectures*, "Inspiration," p. 287 ff.; Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, u.s., i. p. 799.

<sup>3</sup> Denney, u.s., p. 228.

the fact that it is the work of an eye-witness. It hardly needs saying that in this Gospel the Incarnation takes a more conspicuous, because a more definite and dogmatic place than in the Synoptics. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, the Light of the world, the Good Shepherd, the true Vine, the Bridegroom, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. From first to last, God manifesting Himself through the person, the word, the work of our Lord, is the subject of the writer's thought; the unique Sonship is always to the fore (xx. 31). The opening sentences of the Gospel prepare us for what is coming. The Evangelist begins his account of our Lord's ministry with a definite Christology, which has no parallel in the other Gospels, and all that follows is a carefully written explication of this inaugural confession of faith. Nor must it be forgotten that this prologue contains the term *Logos* as applied to our Lord, a term which did more than any other to determine the decisions of the Church as to the nature of Christ's person, and proved a connecting link between the intellect of the world and the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup>

The truth, then, of the Incarnation was, from the Evangelists' point of view, absolutely essential to the Christian religion. It is no less a part of the earliest than of the latest Gospel. Nor, indeed, is this disputed by the negative critic. What, however, he does dispute is the authenticity of the documents,—and this because he is fully aware that, granted the authenticity, the difficulty of interpreting Christ from His own standpoint is insuperable. For this reason the principal attack is directed against the historicity of the Gospels—everything in them, whether of word or act, that would raise our Lord above the level of ordinary humanity being attributed to the imaginative devotion of His followers. Now, it might, perhaps, be rash to assert that an idealised Christ, a Christ such as rationalism would construct from the Gospel narrative, has no standing within the bounds of possibility, but it is not rash to say that those who make the attempt have to meet improbabilities which go far in the direction of the impossible. Dr. Fairbairn shrewdly points out the intellectual confusion that such a position involves. Speaking of the ascription of

<sup>1</sup> See chapter ix.

Deity to Christ by the first generation of Christians, he says: "How, then, are we to conceive the genesis of this common and creative idea of the New Testament, this constitutive and regulative idea of the Church? Its source must have been one acknowledged and revered by all tendencies and all parties, for only so can their agreement in this and their difference in other respects be understood. And this source could be but one—the mind of Christ. His teaching can explain the rise, the forms, and the contents of the apostolic literature, but this literature could never explain how His teaching came to be. Postulate His mind, and we may derive from it the apostolic thought; but postulate this thought, and we could never deduce from it His mind and history. In other words, He is the historical antecedent and the logical premiss of the Epistles, and it is open to no intellectual strategy to invert or change their relations."<sup>1</sup>

*Postulate His mind, and we may derive from it the apostolic thought.* Can we doubt, assuming as we do, the substantial truth of the Gospel narrative, that the disciples, as they looked back, as they reflected on all that they had seen and heard, were fully convinced that they had received the truth of the Incarnation directly from the Lord Himself? It has been said (and the words forcibly convey the truth) that "The doctrine of the Trinity was overheard rather than heard from their Master."<sup>2</sup> It would be much less than the truth to say the same of the Incarnation. If the words attributed by the Evangelists to our Lord are substantially true, He spoke plainly of His unique relation to the Father; and it was chiefly (may we not believe?) in these plain statements

<sup>1</sup> *u.s.*, p. 474. Dr. Denney, whilst admitting that some degree of expansion of our Lord's sayings was almost inevitable before they took their place in the Gospels, shows convincingly the unreasonableness of attributing large portions of the Gospels to the inventive powers of the primitive Church, and pertinently asks, Why did the Church suddenly cease to produce such fruits of faith? How did its fertility come to an end? "And when Christian faith was yielding such gracious fruits without apparently conscious effort, when it uttered itself spontaneously in the parables of the kingdom or the Sermon on the Mount, how are we able to explain the fact that neither Paul, nor any other New Testament writer—and surely they all had faith—could ever produce a page which even remotely reminded us of the manner of our Lord?"—*u.s.*, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 131.



concerning Himself that the doctrine of the Trinity was *overheard*.

To the present writer it is altogether incredible that the portrait in the Gospels is, to all intents and purposes, an imaginary one. John Stuart Mill's words have been often quoted, but, coming from such a source, can hardly be quoted too often: "It is no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the traditions of His followers. Who is capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels?"<sup>1</sup> The trustworthiness of the canonical Gospels has, perhaps, its best vindication in the apocryphal writings that followed them. The difference is exactly what might be expected between a first-hand record and a floating tradition, upon which credulity and superstition have been busy for a century or more. "It would have been easier for a literary committee to have created Shakespeare than for a company of Apostles and Evangelists to have created the figure and teaching of Christ, except as an attempt to describe and explain a transcendent Personality, who had lived before their eyes and had reproduced Himself in their lives. This is the ultimate fact of Christianity, and it cannot be resolved away."<sup>2</sup>

*It cannot be resolved away.* As the result of sound, unprejudiced criticism, the historic Christ is more real and intelligible to the present than to any previous generation;<sup>3</sup> and it is upon the historic Christ that the superstructure of the Church rests. Christianity centres in His person. The essence of Christianity is not to be found in His teaching, but in Himself, and in His personal relation, on the one hand to God, on the other to man. To throw suspicion, therefore, upon the substantial truth of the Gospel record, the only portrait that we have of Christ, is to aim a blow at the vitals of Christianity. It is impossible to leave the historic basis of our religion an open question, and retain anything but a shadow of the Christian faith. There must

<sup>1</sup> *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Lidgett, *The Christian Religion*, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> See Fairbairn, *Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. viii.

be certainty here; we must be sure of our foundation; in other words, we must be sure of our Christ, as portrayed by the Evangelists. It is impossible to dwell at any length upon this fundamental question. We have touched upon it because we cannot deal with the witness borne by the Gospels to the Incarnation without facing the fact that here we are in the very citadel of our faith, and that if a negative criticism should force an entrance—should, that is, succeed in permanently discrediting the substantial trustworthiness of the Evangelists, its work in other directions will not be difficult. “Christianity stands or falls, lives or dies, with the personality of Jesus Christ; and the Gospel is our introduction to Jesus Christ”;<sup>1</sup>—our only introduction; and if *it* is found wanting, the Christ in whom we have believed is “resolved away.”

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INCARNATION AS HELD BY THE INFANT CHURCH

SHORTLY after the Ascension, Christ's promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. It would be difficult to exaggerate the confirmation which this fulfilment brought to the faith of the disciples.

In dealing with the Incarnation as accepted and taught by the Church of the first days, it is well to bear in mind three correlated facts. In the first place, we know beyond dispute that the Old Testament Scriptures connected the coming of the Messiah with an outpouring of the Spirit. The Messianic reference of Isaiah xi. 1 ff., lxi. 1 ff.; Jerem. xxxi. 31 ff.; Ezek. xxxvi. 25 ff.; Joel ii. 28, 29, was unquestioned. To the mind of a devout and instructed Jew a notable effusion of the Divine Spirit was an essential feature of the Messianic hope.

In the second place, Christ, in the hearing of His disciples, had claimed that Messianic prophecy was fulfilled in His

<sup>1</sup> Burkitt, *u.s.*, p. 284.

coming, and had, in accordance with that claim, shaped His course. He had even assigned to His own death a sacrificial and vicarious virtue, and had announced the inauguration, through His own blood, of a new and better covenant. In no part of the Gospel is the Messianic claim more expressly advanced than in the promise of the Comforter. To the fact of such promise we have the explicit testimony of St. John and St. Luke.<sup>1</sup> Their direct witness may be corroborated by abundant indirect proof gathered from the Synoptics. Throughout our Lord's ministry, as described by all the Evangelists alike, there is not only a distinct, but a deepening, consciousness that His personal work would be crowned by a mighty spiritual movement, which should carry forward and universalise His own mission. Indeed, unless we range ourselves with the very few who deny that our Lord claimed to be the Messiah, we can hardly question His assured belief that His life and ministry would be associated with a manifestation of the Divine Spirit, to which the history of the past could offer no parallel. The promise of Pentecost was therefore a natural, even necessary, expression of the Messianic consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

In the third place, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is an historical fact. The promise of the Master was fulfilled. Personally, the disciples could testify to a change which they never ceased to trace to the Pentecostal gift. Out of weakness they were made strong; feebleness, fickleness, timidity, were exchanged for firmness, independence, enthusiasm. They went forth with a message that brought new life to the world. To quote an unprejudiced witness—"As regards the founding of the Christian faith, the course of history can only be accounted for by the supposition of a Divine inspiration of the Founder and His disciples, an inspiration which has lasted down to our own time. . . . It (*i.e.* the first years of the Christian era) was indeed a marvellous age, a time of inspiration, of the mixture of the human and Divine into a draught which should restore to health

<sup>1</sup> John xiv.-xvi.; Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The evidential importance of the Messianic consciousness can hardly be exaggerated. The present writer has attempted to deal with the subject in *The Self-Interpretation of Jesus Christ*, especially in chapter iv.

a sickening world.”<sup>1</sup> It was “a time of inspiration”; such the disciples of our Lord knew and felt it to be with a force and vividness which it is impossible for us to realise—inspiration exercised in the power of Pentecost, but primarily derived, as they well knew, and never failed to affirm, from Christ. For, from the first they knew that the Spirit was imparting to them the things of Christ, that they might give them to the world. It was “a time of inspiration”; and if those who compiled our Gospels and wrote the Epistles could have read even the best of the literature produced by the sub-apostolic age—still more, could they have compared the canonical with the apocryphal Gospels—they would have had an additional and convincing proof that the first century of our era was “a time of inspiration.” As we look back upon the course that history has taken for nineteen hundred years, we may surely believe that the Apostles had solid grounds for believing and acting as they did, and may reject the explanation that they were victims of their own pious imagination, and succeeded in persuading the world to share their illusion.

For (and this at the present stage of our inquiry is our main thought) from the very first, nothing less than the Godhead of our Lord was proclaimed. Not that there was the slightest sympathy with Docetic thought in the primitive Church. How could there have been in the minds, for example, of the Apostles any tendency to doubt or obscure the true manhood of Him with whom for years they had conversed, travelled, lived? Docetism might spring up, as it did spring up, amongst those who had not known Jesus Christ in the flesh, and who were so impressed with His transcendent majesty that their faith in his Divinity was allowed to obscure their faith in His humanity. But to Christ’s own immediate followers this was an impossible attitude. To them He must always be (to use the language of St. Peter) “Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.” Who, apart from prejudice, can read the Gospels to-day without perceiving the intense reality of the human life there portrayed? Could that life ever cease to be profoundly human to those who had witnessed and shared it?

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Percy Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, pp. 142, 157.

This may seem so obvious as to be unworthy of notice. Yet it is extremely important that it should have a prominent place in our thought. The Incarnation means the union of two natures, Divine and human; and if we failed to satisfy ourselves that this truth was recognised and held from the first, an element of doubt would be introduced which would leave us very much at the mercy of the rationalist. Could it be proved that the doctrine of the Incarnation had, for example, been introduced into the Church by the influence of St. Paul at the distance even of a quarter of a century from the time of our Lord's death, a negative criticism would find removed from its path what is, perhaps, the only insurmountable barrier to its working hypothesis, namely, that the faith of Christendom is built on illusion.<sup>1</sup>

Nor can too much be made of the character of the primary witnesses to the Christian faith. Attention has often been called to the fact that they possessed, so far as we may infer, every qualification that would render them trustworthy. "The chosen witnesses have exactly the qualities which a judge would point out to a jury as grounds for giving particular weight to their evidence on questions of fact coming within their view."<sup>2</sup> They were fully persuaded in their own minds and ready to die for their convictions; they were men of very dissimilar temperament—men, therefore, of independent judgment—men, moreover, as might be shown from the Gospels, of quick and correct observation. Such were the persons whom Christ had chosen and trained to be the first evangelists; these are the men to whom, in the first instance, Christendom owes the primitive Gospel, which, as we tried to show in the preceding chapter, has always been witness-in-chief to the truth of the Incarnation.

Nothing is more demonstrably certain than the fact that, from the day of Pentecost onwards, Christ, to those who had personally known Him and companied with Him, was both the Man Christ Jesus and the Son of God, declared to be such by the resurrection from the dead. It is true that in the

<sup>1</sup> This, virtually, is the favourite contention of an influential school of criticism which would make St. Paul rather than Christ the real founder of the Christian Church.

<sup>2</sup> Latham, *Pastor Pastorum*, p. 242. Cp. Gore, *u.s.*, pp. 74, 75.



early chapters of the Acts we look in vain for the Christology of the Epistles; but we do not search in vain for the Incarnation. The time was not come for the "co-ordinate attempts at an interpretation of Christ," which the thought of the Church, both individual and collective, demanded even in the life-time of the Apostles. Nevertheless, attributes are assigned, work is ascribed, titles are given to our Lord incompatible with anything short of belief in His essential Divinity. A glance at the utterances of St. Peter and others in these days of the Church's infancy will put this beyond question.

At every opportunity, on every occasion, Jesus is fully acknowledged as the expected Messiah. He is the Prophet whom the Lord should raise up in the last days (iii. 22, vii. 37); the Servant of the Lord (iii. 13, 26; iv. 27, 30); the Holy One (ii. 27); the Righteous One (vii. 52; cp. xxii. 14<sup>1</sup>); the Holy and Righteous One (iii. 14); the Prince (v. 31);<sup>2</sup> the Prince of life (iii. 15); the Bringer in of the dispensation of the Spirit (ii. 16).

In these titles and allusions is proclaimed the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy in Christ. All this, however, He might be, and yet not be the Word incarnate. But the Apostles do not hesitate to apply to their glorified Master terms which unmistakably imply their belief in His Divinity. He is Lord (i. 21, ii. 34, 36); Lord of all (x. 36)—Lord being the Old Testament designation of Jehovah; and although it would be a mistake to suppose that the title from the lips of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost had the full connotation that belongs to it in the Pauline Epistles, it yet clearly conveys the suggestion of divine prerogative. He Himself bestows the Spirit (ii. 33, 38); He could turn those who received Him from their iniquities (iii. 26). Forgiveness of sins is God's gift to man through Him (ii. 38, v. 31); He is the sole source of salvation (iv. 12, v. 31); miracles are wrought in His name (iii. 16, iv. 10); He is exalted to the right hand of power (ii. 33, v. 31, vii. 56; cp. iii. 21); He will return at the close of the Messianic dispensation to judge the world in righteous-

<sup>1</sup> The Just One (ὁ δίκαιος) is a Messianic title in the Book of Enoch.

<sup>2</sup> ἀρχηγός, frequent in LXX.; elsewhere in the New Testament only Heb. ii. 10, xii. 2.

ness (x. 42 ; cp. iii. 21) ; He is the Hearer and Answerer of prayer (i. 24, vii. 59, ix. 14).

The historical accuracy of the earlier chapters of the Acts is seriously questioned by many critics ; and it may be conceded that the first-hand authority which is so obvious in much of the later portion of the Book is wanting to the chapters we have been examining. For our purpose, however, it is unnecessary to insist upon literal exactitude in respect either of fact or speech.<sup>1</sup> It is enough for us that St. Luke has given a real picture of the earliest period of the Church's life, and a substantially accurate account of the Church's faith towards her Founder. Of this, did space permit, clear proof might be given,—proof that should satisfy the impartial inquirer that the writer of the Acts, who emphasised the care with which he had compiled his Gospel (Luke i. 1-4), did not fail to exercise the same diligence when writing the history of the infant Church.<sup>2</sup> It may be added that the New Testament itself contains striking internal evidence of the trustworthiness of our authority, since the fact that the Christology of St. James and St. Peter is in significant harmony with this section of the Acts, whilst that of St. Paul presents many points of contrast, strongly corroborates the substantial accuracy of St. Luke in his account of the Church and her faith in this part of his writings.

When we speak of the difference between St. Paul's conception of our Lord's person and that presented in the earliest records that have come down to us, it must not be supposed that the contrast involves contradiction. On the contrary, the fundamental identity of St. Paul's teaching with that of the original Apostles is perhaps the most convincing proof we have that the truth of the Incarnation was both apprehended and proclaimed from the first. It is practically certain that

<sup>1</sup> Attention may be called to a series of articles by Professor Sir W. M. Ramsay on "The Authorities used in Acts i.-xii," *Expositor*, ser. vii. vol. vii. The writer of these papers admits various degrees of accuracy in the master of detail, and even in the record of facts, but convincingly upholds the faithfulness of the picture presented by St. Luke of the life of the primitive Church. To the *speeches* he assigns a very high degree of authenticity.

<sup>2</sup> "That the preface to his first book applies—with proper modification—to his second book may be taken for granted."—Ramsay, *u.s.*, p. 173.

his Gospel was in all essentials identical with that of St. Peter. He has left some record (Gal. ii. 11) of a personal encounter between himself and St. Peter in respect of the Judaizing temper of a section of the Church, but there is no indication whatever of disagreement on fundamental questions affecting the person of Christ. "He tells us that he compared notes with the leading Apostles at Jerusalem, to make sure that he and they were preaching substantially the same thing (Gal. ii. 2). And again, at the end of the conferences, he tells us how James and Peter and John gave to him and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, as a pledge of their substantial agreement (*ibid.*, v. 9)." <sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, his status in the older Christian community was fully recognised (Gal. i. 23, 24). Nor is there a word in his letters to the Corinthian and Galatian Churches (and the Judaizers were active in both) to show that there was any important difference of opinion as to the person of our Lord between himself and those whose Judaizing tendency he opposed.

"We are compelled," writes Dr. Sanday, "to suppose that at the very beginning of this period (*i.e.* 30-60) the belief in the Deity of Christ was substantially complete; it must have been a universal assumption of the Christian Church from the day of Pentecost onwards. And this result is overwhelmingly confirmed by the Epistles of St. Paul." <sup>2</sup> Dr. Sanday might have added that the same conclusion is strongly supported by St. Paul's attitude to Christianity before his conversion; for to what was his bitter hostility to the infant Church due save to the transcendental position assigned by the Apostles to their Master. Any doubt that might arise on this point is set at rest by the statement that his mandate from the chief priests was to bind all that "called on this Name" (Acts ix. 14, 21). Doubtless Bishop Gore is justified in saying that "to have preached 'Jesus Christ is God' nakedly and simply, would have shocked every right-minded Jew." <sup>3</sup> We have no ground for supposing that this was done—quite

<sup>1</sup> Sanday, *Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Sanday, "The Bearing of Criticism upon the Gospel History," *Expository Times*, Dec. 1908, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 96.

the contrary ; but the real intent and purport of the Apostles' language was clear enough to Saul of Tarsus, and the shock that it caused was shown by his conduct.

Far deeper, fuller interpretations of Christ are put forth as the apostolic age runs its course ; but from the first the Church takes her stand upon the truth of the Incarnation—the truth that Jesus Christ was “ God manifest in the flesh.” It is a striking fact, when we reflect upon the nature of that truth, that the witness of Scripture bears no trace of intellectual difficulty in the apprehension or acceptance of the great dogma which constitutes the foundation of the Christian creed. And in this we have proof that the faith of the Apostles, which became the faith of the Church, was the fruit of an intimate personal knowledge of Christ Himself, since it is a matter of observation that “ difficulties in logic do not trouble us at all where facts of experience are in question.”<sup>1</sup> The testimony of the Apostles and first Christians was one of personal experience—“ We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard ” (Acts iv. 20). What they had heard and seen, including the experience of Pentecost, had assured them beyond all possibility of doubt that He whose servants they were could claim their allegiance in virtue of His Divine authority. It was the complaint of Emerson that Christian theology is vitiated by “ a nauseous exaggeration of the person of Christ.” To the mind of one who has definitely repudiated the Catholic belief in our Lord this is a natural, if not inevitable, thought. Only let it be distinctly understood that theology would cease to be in any true sense Christian if Emerson had his way, and his subject of complaint were removed. To deny the true Divinity of Jesus Christ is definitely to break with the continuity of Christian thought. “ On the doctrine of Christ's person the historical Christian Church has committed itself beyond recall.”<sup>2</sup> The very foundations of the Church were laid upon that doctrine. The “ nauseous exaggeration ” complained of was as conspicuous in the first days after Pentecost

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 132. Bishop Gore is speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, but the words would appear even more appropriate to that of the Incarnation.

<sup>2</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 25.

as in the age of Athanasius. To give up the doctrine of the Incarnation were to give up Christianity as it was taught by the Apostles within two months of the death and resurrection of Christ.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE INCARNATION IN THE EPISTLES

WE pass from the earliest knowledge that we possess of primitive belief in the Incarnation to consider that truth as it found expression in the expanding thought and life of the apostolic period. This has come down to us in the epistolary writings of the New Testament. Before, however, briefly examining these, it may be well to draw attention to a few leading principles which characterise the formation of belief on this subject.

(a) The organic relation of the Old to the New Testament is never lost sight of. The attitude of the several writers towards the fulfilment of prophecy and their method of its interpretation may vary, but the appeal of all alike is to the promises made to the fathers. One and all they recognised God's redemptive purpose in the Scriptures ; one and all they believed that this purpose had been carried into effect by Jesus of Nazareth. Long before the compiler of the first Gospel interspersed his work with quotations from the Old Testament and multiplied opportunities of finding in Christ's life and ministry the fulfilment of prophecy, St. Peter and St. Stephen had taken the Jews on their own ground, the ground of Scripture, with the view of establishing the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah. That Christian experience transcended all that could be learned from the Law and the Prophets we shall see as we trace the doctrine of the Incarnation through the principal writings of the Apostles, but the Christology of the New Testament is, from first to last, rooted in the ancient Scriptures.

(b) It is important to bear in mind that belief in the Deity of Christ was embraced with unchangeable conviction by men



who were convinced monotheists. Nor, in worshipping Christ as God, did they compromise, much less abandon, their monotheism. To them God was, to the end, the God of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, without anticipating the Trinitarian controversy of a later age, their ideas of the Godhead were so much enlarged that they could see God in Christ, and still believe both in Jehovah and in the eternal Father, who was the chief theme of Christ's own teaching. Without attempting an explanation either to themselves or others, they realised (and this through their Christian faith) that personality, in its most exalted and archetypal form, admits of distinction and fellowship. "Personality, indeed, has never been the bare unity of a monad. It always has room for distinctions, and reaches its greatest wealth of meaning in the fellowship of person with person."<sup>1</sup> It may be that this conception of personality was but dimly apprehended by the primitive Christian; but in the very act of co-ordination Christ with God, and placing Him, so to say, side by side with the Father, the religious consciousness found place for it.

(c) We are thus led to recognise a still more significant and fundamental aspect of the Incarnation as exhibited in the greater Christologies of the New Testament, namely, that of the attempt to interpret Christ, the Apostles found a new and satisfying interpretation of God Himself. The development of Christological belief, from the earliest to the latest in apostolic literature, has for its underlying thought the truth declared by our Lord Himself, "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." More and more did the disciples think of Christ as the manifestation of the God of their fathers, and find rest to their souls in so doing. The fuller apprehension of Christ was the fuller apprehension of God; all their conceptions of God were coloured by their knowledge of Christ. And their thought became the thought of the Church, and of the world, so far as it was affected by the Church. "The Father is conceived, studied, interpreted through the Son. The men who entered into His consciousness looked at God with His eyes, thought of God in His way, learned to speak of God in His terms, and bequeathed to us as their abiding

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, u.s., i. p. 807.

legacy an interpretation of Christ which was an interpretation of God."<sup>1</sup> It was an interpretation which satisfied all sorts and conditions of men. Can we explain, apart from the hypothesis of inspiration, the fact that the theism of Origen and Athanasius, of Augustine and Anselm, of Pascal and Butler, had its birth nineteen hundred years ago in the experience of Galilean fishermen?<sup>2</sup>

(d) One other characteristic of the literature which enshrines the Christology of apostolic days must be noted, namely, that it not only presupposes the facts which have been preserved for us in the Gospels, but also the general knowledge of those facts. This is true, though not equally so, of all the Epistles; most true of all in regard to the writings of St. Paul and that Epistle which, although not from his hand, was almost certainly written under his influence—the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Epistles would be meaningless without the Gospels; moreover, they contain just such allusions to the life and character of our Lord as we might expect to find in pastoral or didactic letters addressed to those already instructed in the faith. All the apostolic writings, indeed, bear conclusive testimony to an authoritative tradition as to the historic events of the life of Christ, thus confirming the truth of the Gospels by documentary evidence earlier than the Gospels themselves.<sup>3</sup>

We must now very briefly examine the principal statements on the subject of our Lord's person and nature made by St. Paul and others—made, as they believed, and as the Church has always believed, under the guidance of the

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup> See Illingworth, *Personality, Human and Divine*, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> Nothing could be more false to fact than the familiar contention of rationalistic writers that "St. Paul knew but few facts in the life of his Master, and had heard but little of His teaching."—Gardner, *Growth of Christianity*, p. 34. On the contrary, "The Gospel history is the very ground-work of the Apostle's thought."—Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 305. "It is usually said that St. Paul knows nothing and cares nothing for the earthly life of Jesus, that all his interest and concern is with the resurrection and the risen life. The fact is, I think, that St. Paul is the first to understand and interpret that life."—Du Bose, *The Gospel in the Gospels*, p. 18. See Knowling, *Witness of the Epistles and Testimony of St. Paul to Christ*; also, *Self-Interpretation of Jesus Christ*, chap. ii., by the present writer.

Holy Spirit. We begin with the earliest of the Pauline writings, namely, the two letters to the Thessalonians. The first was written not later than 53; it may be two or three years earlier. Passing straight from the early chapters of the Acts, we become aware that constructive thought has been brought to bear upon the subject of our Lord's person. The Christology is more systematic, more definite, more fundamental. In the opening salutation (one which became a stereotyped mode of greeting in the Apostle's correspondence), Jesus Christ is co-ordinated with the Father (i. 1); the Church has its being in Christ (ii. 14); Christ has died for us, and our salvation is through Him (v. 9); He delivers from wrath to come (i. 10); He is in heaven, and will return in glory (i. 10, ii. 19, iii. 13, iv. 16); He is the Lord Jesus (i. 1, 3, iii. 13, iv. 1). The Epistle concludes with the familiar words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (v. 28).

The second Epistle<sup>1</sup> appears to have followed close on the first. Here we find the Old Testament language about Jehovah applied to Christ (i. 7), who is also associated with the Father as the source of consolation and strength (ii. 16, 17). Christians are commanded and exhorted in the name of Jesus Christ (iii. 6, 12). In these Epistles we have taken a decisive step in the direction of our creeds.<sup>2</sup>

Next in the generally received chronological order, and probably some four or five years later, come the two Epistles to the Corinthians, which contain very important teaching on the subject of the Incarnation—teaching which indicates great development of thought on the part of the Apostle. Christ is the Lord of glory (ii. 8); the one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and we through Him (viii. 6);<sup>3</sup> He is a "life-giving Spirit," as contrasted with the first Adam, who was a "living soul" (xv. 45). Christ is the absorbing subject of his thought, the reiterated theme of his preaching

<sup>1</sup> The genuineness of 2 Thess. is not so universally admitted as that of the first Epistle.

<sup>2</sup> See Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 220; and on the theology of 1 Thess., see pp. 217, 218.

<sup>3</sup> A link with the more explicit cosmic aspect of the Incarnation given in the Epistle to the Colossians.

(i. 13 ff.; ii. 2); He is the power of God and the wisdom of God (i. 24, 30); He is the one foundation of the universal Church (iii. 11). This is followed up in the second Epistle by words, if possible, more significant. He is "the image of God" imparting to man a knowledge of the glory of God (iv. 4-6); He is the Judge of all (v. 10); He is the efficient medium of reconciliation to God (v. 19); He is the pre-existent One, who emptied Himself that He might enrich the world (viii. 9). At the close of the Epistle He is co-ordinated with the Father and the Holy Spirit in a form of benediction which indicates that a doctrine of the Trinity was already taking an important place in the faith and teaching of the Church (xiii. 14).

The personal and controversial character of the Epistle to the Galatians (probably the next in time) gave little scope for systematic doctrinal teaching, but the very nature of the conflict which led to its being written called forth the highest energies of the writer in proclaiming Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of man. He "gave Himself for our sins" (i. 4; cp. iii. 13); the secret of his own apostleship is the revelation of the Son of God in Him (i. 15, 16); man is only justified through faith in Christ (ii. 16, iii. 22); he can only live the true life through union with Him (ii. 20); we become the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, who is none other than the eternal Son sent forth by the Father, that we might receive the adoption of sons (iv. 4, 5; cp. Rom. viii. 14 ff.).

We can do no more than glance at the Epistle to the Romans, the last in the group of four which follow the two to the Thessalonians. This, the greatest of St. Paul's writings, contains the most detailed statement we possess of what he terms his Gospel, *i.e.* the Gospel of the uncircumcision, as contrasted with that of the circumcision (xvi. 25; cp. Eph. iii. 3, 6, 9; Gal. vi. 15; Col. iii. 11). He writes from the same point of view as when he addressed the Galatians, but his thought is now systematically worked out, and occupies the larger part of the letter. The central position which our Lord and His work hold in the argument marks a distinct advance in the Apostle's thought concerning Christ as the one Mediator between God and man. All that we can here

do is to note some of the terms in which he speaks of our Lord. Jesus Christ is to be confessed as "Lord," and that in the full sense of the title as given in the Old Testament to Jehovah, passages referring to Jehovah being, without hesitation, applied to Christ (x. 9-13). He is God's "own Son,"<sup>1</sup> in whom we receive the adoption of sons (viii. 15); of this unique Sonship the Resurrection is proof (i. 1-4); He is the Head of the human race, from whom its renewed life is derived (v. 14 ff.; cp. 1 Cor. xv. 22, 45 ff.); He is God, blessed for ever (ix. 5), and as such He is Lord both of the dead and the living (xiv. 9); His work has a cosmic significance, since the universe, having been injured by the sin of man, shares with him the redemptive purpose of the Incarnation (viii. 19 ff.).

The Epistle to the Philippians, which we may take first of those written by St. Paul in his earlier captivity, contains one statement of the highest importance in regard to the Incarnation (ii. 5-11). In this classical passage the Apostle goes as near to formulating his faith on this subject as in any part of his extant writings. Without pausing to discuss the terms here employed, we may note the clear conviction with which he writes, both as to the pre-existence and the Godhead of Christ.

In the Epistle to the Colossians the main argument centres in the Incarnation. Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation (i. 15); He is the source, the goal, the principle of cohesion, of all created things (i. 16, 17); He is the Head of the Church, and is in all things to have the pre-eminence (i. 18); in Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead (i. 19, ii. 9); to Him belongs a world-embracing power of reconciliation (i. 20, ii. 14, 15); He is the mystery of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (ii. 2, 3); in Him who had assumed our nature, and who was from the beginning the Head of all principality and power, men might attain to the fullest possibilities of their being (ii. 10 ff.). Chiefly from this Epistle it may be seen that St. Paul's later Christology was more developed than that of any other New Testament writer.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the

<sup>1</sup> τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱόν (viii. 3); τοῦ ὁμοῦ υἱοῦ (viii. 32).

<sup>2</sup> Inge, *Personal Idealism and Mysticism*, p. 47 ff.



course of his spiritual development, he had framed a very complete logos-theology, which led the way to the systematic teaching of Clement and Origen, and of Athanasius himself.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians we have much the same presentation of Christ as in that to the Colossians, and as the letters were written about the same time, this is only what might be expected.<sup>1</sup> In Him (and that before the foundation of the world) was the ideal, archetypal humanity (i. 4), so that the Divine purpose is that all men should grow up into Him (iv. 15, 16); through Him, as the one Mediator, we have access to the Father (ii. 18; cp. Col. i. 21, 22); in Him the Church is built up and grows into a holy temple (ii. 21, 22; cp. Col. ii. 7); there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism (iv. 5); Christ is the Divine Bridegroom, who presents the Church to Himself (v. 25-27).

We now come to the last division of the Pauline writings, and one whose genuineness, like that of the Epistle to the Ephesians, is still somewhat seriously questioned, namely, the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>2</sup> Even if St. Paul was not their author, their Christology is an important contribution to the subject of the Incarnation as presented in the New Testament, and must be briefly noticed. The faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (i. 15), not only echoes one of our Lord's most familiar utterances, but conveys an intimation of His pre-existence. Jesus Christ is the One Mediator between God and man (ii. 5). The writer quotes from a hymn which could only have been used by a Church that believed in the Incarnation (iii. 16). Twice our Lord is co-ordinated in a somewhat unusual manner and connection with God the Father (v. 21, vi. 13). In the second Epistle, the salvation of man is traced to God's purpose in Christ before times eternal (i. 9); the living Christ has abolished death and brought life and incorruption to light, and He is able to guard that which has been committed to Him (i. 10-12). A faithful saying is quoted, in which the Church confesses that her life is bound up with Christ (ii. 11, 12). The saving

<sup>1</sup> See especially i. 10, 20-23, ii. 13 ff.

<sup>2</sup> It may be mentioned that the genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles has been confidently upheld by Professor Sir W. M. Ramsay during the present year (1909) in the *Expositor* for June. See p. 486 ff.

power of Scripture is from Him, who is its central subject (iii. 15). The Lord Christ is Judge of quick and dead (iv. 1, 8).

Like the other pastoral epistles, the letter to Titus is a private one—therefore not likely to contain important doctrinal matter. Here, however, the writer does not hesitate to speak of “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (ii. 13),<sup>1</sup> and in all that he has to say concerning man’s salvation a place is assigned to Christ which nothing but the Incarnation could justify (ii. 13, 14, iii. 4-7).

Turning to St. Peter, we have but one certainly genuine letter, as contrasted with the many that we have from the pen of St. Paul. If, however, this Epistle is to be dated, as generally held, somewhat later than 60, it expresses the maturer thought of the writer. And when we come to examine its Christology, we find that, whilst lacking the expansion and system of the Pauline teaching, it is a very distinct advance upon the language attributed to St. Peter in the Acts. At the same time, the relation of the earlier to the later thought is unmistakable. Particularly we note that the Christology, from first to last, is rooted in the Old Testament, more especially in the later portion of Isaiah.<sup>2</sup> Passing to details, St. Peter writes to those whose belief in God has become a new thing, a new experience, through faith in Christ (i. 21); He insists upon the sinlessness of Christ (i. 19, ii. 22); the death of Christ is the ground of man’s salvation (i. 18 ff., ii. 21 ff., iii. 18); He is the Lord (i. 3, ii. 13, iii. 15); the Sonship of Christ is unique (i. 3); God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory (i. 21); He is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him (iii. 22); He is the chief Shepherd, who shall return to reward His servants (v. 4); the Church is called to eternal glory in Christ (v. 10).<sup>3</sup>

Those who believe, with the vast majority of scholars, in

<sup>1</sup> So R.V.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Fairbairn describes 1 Peter as “an exposition of Christ in the terms of the second Isaiah.”—*Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 501.

<sup>3</sup> “That St. Peter who so often spoke frankly and plainly to Jesus, and once rebuked Him, and once denied Him, should have come to adore Him as Divine, is a fact most wonderful, and fraught with far-reaching consequences.”—*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, u.s., p. 806.

the common authorship of the fourth Gospel and the first Epistle of St. John, scarcely need reminding that, as of the Gospel, so of the Epistle, the Incarnation of the Son of God is the central thought. Like the later writings of St. Paul, this Epistle contains a rich Christology. In his opening sentences the writer claims an experimental knowledge of the Incarnation (i. 1-4). No New Testament writer more strongly insists upon the true humanity of our Lord, making, as he does, the confession that Christ is "come in the flesh," the very test of Christian faith (iv. 1-3). The objective revelation of the invisible God is what he himself has found in Christ, and his aim in writing is that others may share the treasure with him (i. 3, 4; cp. John i. 18). Jesus Christ is the Paraclete (ii. 1), a title elsewhere only given to the Holy Spirit (John xiv. 16, &c.). Himself sinless, He is manifested to take away sin (iii. 5); He is the Son of God manifested to destroy the works of the devil (iii. 8); He is the only begotten Son, sent into the world that we might live through Him, and that He might be a propitiation for sin (iv. 9, 10, ii. 2, i. 7); He is the Saviour of the world (iv. 14); His return is the hope of the Church (iii. 2); God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (v. 11); it is equally the work of Antichrist to deny the Son as to deny the Father (ii. 23); He is the eternal Life which was with the Father and has been manifested to the world (i. 2). As we read, we realise that the writer lived in the light of the Incarnation, and found in that truth a key to the mysteries and enigmas of life.<sup>1</sup>

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with one of the most important Christological passages in the New Testament. The pre-existence of the Son, the incarnate life, the exaltation to glory, are all placed at the very outset before the reader (i. 1-3). As in other parts of the New Testament, so here, there is no discussion of the two natures, but there is the fullest conviction that Deity has assumed a complete and true humanity (ii. 9, 14 ff., x. 5). There is nothing human that is not His, sin only excepted (iv. 15). The Sonship of Christ, sonship in quite a unique sense, is the key to the writer's thought about Him. It is this eternal Sonship which, as it

<sup>1</sup> The Christology of the second Epistle is an echo of that of the first, whilst the third contains little that bears directly on our subject.

places Him above angels and men alike, enables Him to work out the redemption of a sinful world, and to be the great High Priest of the human race (iv. 14). The Jew had the shadow of good things to come, but the Christian has the substance, because he has Christ, who has brought in the better covenant,<sup>1</sup> and has opened a new and living way into the presence of God (vii. 18, 19). The interpretation of Christ in this Epistle may not be so large and philosophical as that of St. Paul, but it most effectively fulfils its aims which is to demonstrate that in Christ religion has reached its consummation. Judaism, the highest and purest of pre-Christian faiths, is shown to be but a step towards the full and final revelation of God in His Eternal Son.

From the Epistle of St. James, which is believed by some (not without reasonable grounds) to be the earliest of the apostolic writings, we can add nothing to what has been drawn from other Epistles. The Christology is elementary, but explicit. The writer "identifies Christ the Lord with Jehovah of the Old Testament in a manner which involves the theology of the eternal Sonship"<sup>2</sup> (ii. 1, v. 7, 8, 14, 15). He is co-ordinated with God in the opening salutation (i. 1); His is the "honourable name" into which they had been baptized (ii. 7); He is the Righteous One (v. 6). Prayer and unction are "in the name of the Lord" (v. 14, 15). The return of Christ as Judge is near at hand (v. 8, 9; cp. iv. 12). The writer makes clear his position as a Christian believer, and as such indicates his agreement with the teaching of the primitive Church.<sup>3</sup>

Seeing that the Book of Revelation forms part of the canon of Scripture, and was certainly written in apostolic times, there is no need, for our purpose, to refer to the question of authorship; but no one can read the Book without finding the truth of the Incarnation as clearly proclaimed as in any part of the New Testament. The triumphant Christ is its central theme. Borrowing thought as well as language from

<sup>1</sup> The word *κρείττων* (better) is very characteristic of the Epistle, and is used in many connections to emphasise the superiority and finality of the Christian dispensation; "better than the angels," "better hope," "better covenant," "better promises," "better sacrifices," "better things."

<sup>2</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> On the Christology of St. James, see Ottley, *u.s.*, p. 88 ff.

the Old Testament, the writer, like the ancient prophets, predicts the final victory of the Divine righteousness; "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"; but it is the Lord God who has manifested Himself in Christ (xi. 15). Equally with the Father is Jesus Christ the source of blessing (i. 4, 5); He is the First and the Last, and the Living One who has the keys of death and Hades (i. 17, 18); He is on the throne (iii. 21, &c.); worship is paid to Him as God (v. 8-12, vii. 10, &c.); His Sonship is unique (i. 6, ii. 27, iii. 21); His is the incommunicable name (iii. 12, xix. 12); the message to the Churches is from Him, as Lord of the Church (ii., iii.). Pre-existent (i. 17, 18, xxi. 6, xxii. 13), He has lived and died and risen again as Man (i. 5, 18), and will return in glory to judge the world (i. 7, xiv. 14-16, xxii. 20); He is the heavenly Bridegroom, who unites with Himself, in mystic union, His bride the Church (xix. 7 ff.). The adoration paid to our Lord, so conspicuous in every part of the New Testament, surely reaches its climax in this its closing section.

"On this faith," says Dr. Gardner, "the society relied in its conflict with the world, and by it the world was conquered. The Church recognised her Lord as not only a Founder, a Teacher, and an Inspirer in the past, but as the present Word or Son of God, the channel by which Divine grace came into the heart of the believer, a revealer to mankind of the Father of whom Jesus had in his life-time continually spoken. It is as if the risen Christ had continually addressed to His Church the exhortation, 'Do the will of God,' and the Church had as continually replied, 'Without Thee we can do nothing.'"<sup>1</sup> In the brief and imperfect sketch given in this chapter we have seen the nature of this faith in Christ, namely, that (as Dr. Gardner admits) it was faith in nothing less than the Incarnation of the Son of God. The faith of the first disciples was in One who is as truly God as He is truly Man.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Growth of Christianity*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> "The Christian religion is not built upon faith in Jesus of Nazareth, but upon the belief that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Without this belief the religion could have had no existence; the moment it lived, the religion began to be."—Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 476, cp. Nolloth, *u.s.*, p. 17.



"On this faith the society relied in its conflict with the world, and by it the world was overcome." The only alternative to their being justified in this confidence is that they invented a false Christ, who through their misinterpretation of His person, and not through what He really was, became the supreme factor in history. We may venture, with Dr. Sanday, to set aside such an alternative as incredible. "The history of the world ever since is enough to refute this. The greatest movement in all history cannot be based upon a colossal blunder."<sup>1</sup>

Our aim, it need scarcely be said, has not been to prove that all the New Testament writers held identical views as to the person of our Lord. The time had not come for technical treatment and formulated definition. Such treatment, such definition, was necessary for the safeguarding and transmission of the faith, and the work of the Councils was as necessary as that of the Apostles; but the one in the nature of things was subsequent to the other. Our aim has rather been to show, not that there is one *Christology*, but that there is one *faith* in the New Testament<sup>2</sup>—faith in Jesus Christ as the Divine Saviour, through whom man lives to God. That there was development in apostolic belief concerning the Incarnation is patent to every reader of the Epistles. But is not this just what we might expect, if we believe, as the Church has always believed, in the presence among the first disciples of One whose work it was to guide into all truth? And surely there is striking proof of that Presence in the fact that, amid the thoughts of independent and differently constituted minds on this subject, there is neither confusion nor contradiction. From the rudimentary conceptions, if we may so call them, in the early chapters of the Acts and the Epistle of St. James, to the later teaching of St. Paul and the writings of St. John, there is progressive but harmonious thought—thought that begins and ends with faith in the Incarnation, but develops with the development of life and experience (1 John i. 3). Is there any more reasonable hypothesis than that thought, as well as life and experience, was under the guidance of the Divine Spirit?

<sup>1</sup> "The Bearing of Criticism upon the Gospel History," *Expository Times*, Jan. 1909, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> See Denney, *u.s.*, p. 395.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE INCARNATION FORMULATED BY THE FATHERS

ATTENTION has already been drawn to the fact, not only that the Incarnation was no subject of speculation to those who wrote the New Testament, but also that, apparently, it did not present to their minds the intellectual problems which subsequently arose. It is obvious, however, that a religion based on belief that the historic Christ was both very God and very Man could not for long avoid the necessity of formulating its faith; and this could only be done by facing the most difficult questions that can be presented to the mind of man. The fundamental truth of Christianity was bound to challenge the thought of the world, especially when it came in contact with Hellenic influences and with the philosophies of the day.

Christianity without a creed would have perished.<sup>1</sup> The mere story of the Gospels, beautiful, wonderful as it is, would not have created and sustained the Church without the conclusions which eye-witnesses and Apostles had formed as to the person of Christ and handed down to posterity. The Gospel made its way into the heart of the world because its great Subject and Central Figure was proclaimed the Divine Saviour of mankind. This primary belief of the Church, this conviction of experience, was the original nucleus of the Christian creed. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" appears, from an early gloss in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts viii. 37), to have been the primitive confession of faith. But creeds were not the product of a day.<sup>2</sup> In their mature form they were the growth of centuries—the result of questioning and cross-questioning—of deep thought and constant vigilance. The Church had to prove all things and hold fast that which was good. Speculative thought was brought to bear upon the mysteries of the faith, with the inevitable result that errors and vagaries had to be checked, and truth

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *u.s.*, p. 3 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The date assigned to the earliest form of the Apostles' Creed varies between 100 and 150. See Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 255.

more clearly defined ; this, too, more particularly in regard to the person of our Lord.

Church history is obscure and Christian literature scanty from the close of the apostolic period until the middle of the second century. This much, however, is clear, namely, that the Church, on the whole, was loyal to primitive teaching. The New Testament is its own witness that, almost from the beginning, there was a recognised body of truth accepted by the Church at large.<sup>1</sup> Sub-apostolic, as compared with apostolic writings, show great theological inferiority and contain a considerable admixture of superstition,<sup>2</sup> but, speaking generally, the faith once delivered to the saints was carefully handed on.<sup>3</sup> The days of speculative thought and philosophical construction were yet to come, but it was the assured conviction of the Church that the world possessed in Christ a spiritual revelation capable of regenerating the life of man, and lifting it into a region of love and hope, whose foundations are in eternity. Faith was for the most part simple because experience was conclusive.

Before the middle of the second century, however, the Church was in active conflict with an enemy that came upon her from without in the form of Gnosticism, an essentially pagan system of thought. Had the Gnostic, with his pronounced dualism and graduated chain of mediation, succeeded in his attempt to capture the Church, or even to effect a compromise between his own belief and that of the New Testament, Christianity would have been poisoned at its source—a pagan Christ would have been substituted for the Christ of our creeds. The attack was repulsed, and the Church came safely through this first intellectual crisis of her history. We connect this controversy, and rightly so, with the great names of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Hippolytus ;

<sup>1</sup> See Gore, *u.s.*, p. 85 ; and on "the form of teaching," see *Romans*, by the same writer, i. p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> On the theological inferiority of the Apostolic Fathers, see Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 67 ff. ; Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Colossians*, p. 122 f. Bishop Lightfoot says, "The Church needed a long education before she was fitted to be the expositor of the true apostolic doctrine. . . The true successors of the Apostles in this respect are not the Fathers of the second century, but the Fathers of the third and fourth centuries," p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Sanday, *u.s.*, p. 221 ff.

the Church's need produced then, as so often since, men of brain and culture qualified to meet the enemy on the field of intellect, able to vindicate their faith on grounds of reason.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as a matter of fact, the victory was rather due to the rank and file of the Church than to the leaders of Christian thought. Holding fast to the apostolic tradition and writings (so far as the latter were known), they refused to be drawn aside into other paths of belief and worship.

The Church's contact with the learning of the ancient world lies somewhat out of our track. It must suffice to say here that, long before the danger from Gnosticism had passed away, the world of thought, as represented by the schools of philosophy, had awoke to the fact that in Christianity it was face to face with a formidable rival. The cause of Christ was upheld by a succession of "apologists," beginning with Quadratus and Aristides in the reign of Hadrian. The most powerful attack on Christianity from this side was made late in the second century by Celsus, the Platonist, in a treatise<sup>2</sup> only known to us through Origen's still more powerful reply, given to the world in 249.

It is with the inner history of the Church that we are now chiefly concerned. The Church's conflict was waged within as well as without her own borders. Her purity and unity alike were threatened by successive movements of thought from within. It is easy at this distance of time—perhaps, too, from our own standpoint of belief—to be severe in dealing with these early heresies,—even to brand with infamy the names of those who gave them birth. Such a temper is altogether unfair. It is far juster to regard them, speaking generally, as honest, often plausible and ingenious, attempts to solve the most difficult problems that can be faced.<sup>3</sup> The Church,

<sup>1</sup> It was in conflict with Gnosticism that the Church discovered the treasures that lay hidden in the *logos* doctrine of St. John, which played such an important part both in the formulation of Christian doctrine, and in commending that doctrine to the intellect of the world. See Ottley, *u.s.*, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Designated *The True Word* (Λόγος ἀληθής).

<sup>3</sup> Nor must it be forgotten that the greatest of the ante-Nicene Fathers used phrases in their presentation of the Deity which the Arian controversy showed to be objectionable, and banished from orthodox expositions of the Faith. See Bigg, *u.s.*, p. 398; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, *u.s.*, p. 122.

however, had no choice but to meet and resist error; the more so since, for the most part, it was the Christian's belief in the person of God that was endangered. We are only indirectly concerned in these pages with the doctrine of the Trinity; but, from the first the doctrine of the Incarnation was inseparably bound up with that of the Trinity; the discussion of the one involved that of the other, and it was mainly with these two truths that the thought of the Church was occupied during the early centuries of her existence.<sup>1</sup>

The Apostles themselves were forced into conflict with false teaching. St. Peter's encounter with Simon Magus and St. Paul's struggle with Judaism were the first acts in long-continued strife for the purity of the faith. There is good reason to believe that St. John at the close of his life came into collision with Cerinthus and his medley of Judaistic Christianity and Gnosticism.<sup>2</sup> Before the close of the first century two opposite heresies, known as Docetism and Ebionism, took shape—the one denying the true manhood, the other the true Godhead of Christ. The Docetæ, holding opinions closely allied to Gnosticism, taught that our Lord's body was unreal—a mere phantom—and that therefore all that is related of His human life in the Gospels was without objective reality, mere appearance (*δόκησις*).<sup>3</sup> Ebionism, on the other hand, represented, in a degenerate form, the Judaistic Christianity of St. Paul's time. The Ebionites were divided into two distinct bodies, Pharisaic and Essene. The former section retained more of the original deposit of apostolic faith than the Essenes, but both alike denied the true Divinity of Christ.

These errors, however, can hardly be said to have affected the main stream of Church thought and life, nor did they call forth for their refutation the energy reserved for later and more specious heresies. The two chief tendencies of thought

<sup>1</sup> An excellent abstract of the teaching of the principal Fathers will be found in Ottley, *u.s.*; also, on a much smaller scale, a valuable summary is given in the appendix (first part) to Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*.

<sup>2</sup> See Westcott, *Epistles of St. John*, pp. xxxiv., 174.

<sup>3</sup> The rise of Docetism was partly due to the rooted antipathy of the Oriental mind to matter. See Bigg, *u.s.*, p. 111.



which disturbed the Church before the Arian controversy of the fourth century are known as *modalism* and *adoptianism*—the one identified particularly with the name of Sabellius, the other with that of Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch.<sup>1</sup> Of the personal history of Sabellius (probably a native of Libya) very little is known, but his name stands for all those unitarian systems in which the Divine nature of Christ was confessed.<sup>2</sup> Sabellianism taught that the designations Father, Son, Spirit, may be applied to one and the same subject,—the one undivided Godhead manifesting Himself under different aspects and in different relations to His creatures. God, so Sabellius taught, has been active in three consecutive energies—first in that of the Father as Creator, then in that of the Son as Redeemer, lastly in that of the Spirit as Giver of life. Here is an assertion of Christ's Deity, but a denial of real distinctions in the Godhead, and therefore a denial of the doctrine of the Trinity. Three persons (πρόσωπα) are acknowledged, but in a sense repudiated by the Nicene Fathers.<sup>3</sup> Sabellianism, like the closely allied system of Patripassianism (associated with the name of Praxeas), continued to break forth in one form or another throughout the Arian controversy, and even later.

The Adoptians, led by Paul of Samosata, like the *Alogi* of the second century and the Ebionites of still earlier date, virtually denied the Godhead of our Lord.<sup>4</sup> They found their Christ, not in the Gospel of St. John, but in the Synoptics, especially in St. Mark. To them Christ was a man, but a man so exceptionally endowed with the Divine Logos, so filled with the Spirit, as to *become* the *adopted* Son of God.

<sup>1</sup> Both *modalism* and *adoptianism* were forms of what was known as *monarchianism*, *i.e.* the unity of God. Sabellius taught in the early part of the third century, Paul of Samosata, 262–272.

<sup>2</sup> “The third century witnessed various attempts to solve the problem of the Godhead on a unitarian basis.”—Ottley, *u.s.*, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> We must be on our guard against finding the same content in the theological use of the term Person as in our common use of the word, which makes it almost synonymous with individual. *Persona* was the Latin equivalent of the Greek *hypostasis*. On *persona* and *hypostasis*, see Liddon, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 32; Inge, *u.s.*, pp. 33, 34.

<sup>4</sup> Theodotus of Byzantium, who taught in Rome late in the second century, is regarded as the father of adoptianism.

Here there is blank denial of the Incarnation ; “the uniqueness of Christ was in His character, not in His nature.” The teaching of Paul of Samosata was, in some sort, an anticipation of Arianism, which followed at no great interval.

The great Arian controversy which, for more than seventy years agitated and rent the Church, now claims our attention. Arius, probably a native of Cyrenaica in Africa, adopted and taught views concerning our Lord which, to modern thought, are unreal and fanciful to the last degree, but which commended themselves to a very large proportion of professing Christians in the days of which we are speaking. He first comes into view as a presbyter of Alexandria in conflict, during the early years of the fourth century, with Alexander, his bishop, by whom, after much forbearance and long delay, his teaching was condemned. This was in 319. The adverse decision of the bishop was the signal for a great schism in the African Church. Nor, though more prevalent in Africa than elsewhere, were the opinions of Arius confined to that continent. The general disturbance, and the rapidity with which this new doctrine spread, led to the calling of the first Œcumenical Council, that of Nicæa, in 325. The controversy, as is well known, hinged upon the two words *homoiousion* (of *like* essence or substance) and *homoousion* (of the *same* essence or substance). Arius was ready to accept the former term, but not the latter, which was in direct opposition to his belief and teaching. The final decision of the Council was against him. Bishop Alexander was present, but the orthodox party was led by Athanasius, a deacon of the Alexandrian Church, who, on the death of Alexander, shortly after the Council, was elected to the vacant see. Arius died in 336 ; but the death of the heresiarch was far from being the end of the movement he had originated, and which, sometimes supported, sometimes opposed, by the temporal power, continued to influence thought within the Church until the second General Council, held at Constantinople in 381, when the Nicene decision was confirmed and finally accepted. Although proscribed by the Church, Arianism continued the belief of a large body of professing Christians until the middle of the seventh century.

The teaching of Arius, notwithstanding that it bears little

or no resemblance to what we know as rationalism to-day, represented the rationalism of contemporary thought. Like other systems repudiated by the Church, it was an attempt to be wise above that which is written, and to explain what is beyond the reach of knowledge—a notable illustration of the fact that “in what concerns the relation of things divine to men, error lies mainly in attempts to render wholly explicable what is but partly apprehensible.”<sup>1</sup> To the modern mind it must seem strange that so large a section of the professing Church was willing to accept the account that Arius gave to his followers of the person of Christ—as the image of the Father, a Son begotten before all worlds, by whom all things were made—a Creature, yet not as one of the creatures—His humanity devoid of human soul, His divinity falling short of Deity—supremely good, yet capable of moral deterioration. This mixture of truth and falsehood, of inspired Scripture and human invention, the Council of Nicæa met and negatived by inserting in the Creed, as it issued from their hands, the word *homoousion*. Arius prided himself upon his logic, “yet sooner or later he always comes round to a contradiction of his own premisses.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact that Arianism was not only able to divide the Church in the early part of the fourth century, but also, at a later period, able to renew its strength and become dominant, first under Constantius and again under Valens, shows that the belief of the Church as a whole was far from being settled on the lines of the Nicene decision. There can be no doubt that the popularity of Arianism was chiefly due to its concessions to pagan thought. In times of peace the teaching of the Church, for generations past, had been nominally accepted by a vast number of persons, who, while calling themselves Christians, retained much of their heathen ways of thinking. Naturally, the close of the Diocletian persecution and the conversion of Constantine were signalised by a large accession to the Church of such nominal members; and thus the conditions were exceptionally favourable to the spread of such a system as Arianism. The trend of thought

<sup>1</sup> Hort, *The Way, the Truth, the Life*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism*, p. 26.

for centuries, as already pointed out, had been towards a theistic form of belief, and the pure monotheism of the Bible had exercised an increasingly potent influence in this direction. There were many, however, who found, in the essential Deity of Christ, as it had been taught from the times of the Apostles, a stumbling-block to their acceptance of the Gospel. For such the teaching of Arius seemed to throw open the door of the kingdom of God; they could be Christians without embracing the Catholic dogma of the Trinity. Hence the popularity of Arianism—hence its support from some of the emperors who followed Constantine, and who were still more than half heathen at heart. To-day it is easy to see that Arianism was an illogical compromise between paganism and Christianity; but for this very reason—just because it was neither the one thing nor the other, it had a strong fascination for the age in which it was put forth. “To the barbarian as well as the heathen it was a half-way halt upon the road to Christianity.”<sup>1</sup> But it left its adherents at a great distance from the teaching of the Apostles. The very essence of New Testament Christianity is that Jesus Christ is the one Mediator between God and man—a Mediator truly God as well as truly Man. Such a Mediator found no place in Christianity as taught by Arius.

It was easy for the opponents of the Faith in the fourth century, as it is the fashion among sceptics to-day, to make light of the distinction between *homoiousion* and *homoousion*; yet on that very distinction depended the existence of the Church. “It is worth noticing that we have independent witnesses, such as Thomas Carlyle and our own Thomas Hill Green, to the necessity of the Church’s action in the condemnation of Arius. ‘The tendency of Arianism,’ said Professor Green, ‘was in one respect just the reverse of Gnosticism. It was not the moral, but the metaphysical side of Christian thought which it lowered, and we owe it

<sup>1</sup> Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, p. 165. Cp. the following: “As a system, Arianism was utterly illogical and unspiritual, a clear step back to heathenism and a plain anachronism even for its own time. It began by attempting to establish Christian positions, and ended by subverting each and all of them. It maintained the unity of God by opening the door to polytheism.”—*Studies of Arianism*, p. 2, by the same writer.

to the firm front opposed by orthodox dogma, that Christian dogma is still a thing of the present: one need not be an orthodox trinitarian to see that if Arianism had had its way, the theology of Christianity would have become of a kind in which no philosopher who had outgrown the demonism of ancient systems could for a moment acquiesce.' Again Mr. Froude writes of Thomas Carlyle: 'He made one remark which is worth recording. In earlier years he had spoken contemptuously of the Athanasian controversy; and he would ring the changes in broad Annandale on the Homoousion and the Homoiousion. He now told me that he perceived Christianity itself to have been at stake. If the Arians had won, it would have dwindled away to a legend.'"<sup>1</sup> A creed without a truly Divine, as well as human, Christ would have been the creed of a Church doomed to fall before the hostile forces of the world—the creed of a Church that had lost her only power for realising the vision of the Apocalypse,—“the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the Arian controversy overshadowed all others, it was not the only one touching the person of our Lord that distracted the Church in the years that followed the Council of Nicæa. The teaching of Apollinarius (died 392), with its defective view of our Lord's perfect manhood, was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381; Nestorius (Patriarch of Constantinople, 428–431), who revived the adoptianism of the third century, was deposed by the General Council of Ephesus in 431; Eutyches,<sup>3</sup> the contemporary and opponent of Nestorius, brought back into the Church a species of Docetism by explaining away the true humanity of Christ as being absorbed in His Godhead, and was excommunicated for his opinions in 449.

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> For good and concise accounts of Arian teaching the reader may be referred to Gwatkin, *u.s.*; Gore, *Bampton Lectures*; Robertson, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. i.; Bright, *History of the Church*, 313–457; Ottley, *Doctrine of the Incarnation*.

<sup>3</sup> Eutychians were subsequently known as Monophysites. For an account of the views of Apollinarius, Nestorius, and Eutyches, see Gore, *u.s.*, lecture iv.



What, however, is really more interesting than the heresies themselves is the way in which they were met, and the reasons for which they were condemned. No greater mistake could be made than to suppose that those who framed the creed of Christendom between 325, when the Council of Nicæa met, and 451, when the final word was said on the Incarnation at Chalcedon,<sup>1</sup> attempted to explain the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith. This is just what they did not do. What they really did was to reject and condemn attempted explanations of the inexplicable. Heresy, whether in the time of Tertullian or Athanasius, was an endeavour to rationalise the Faith—in other words, to explain it to the finite mind of man. This the truest thinkers of every age have seen to be impossible. The Fathers clearly perceived that it was the Church's duty, not to explain, but to transmit. "Individuals could not be allowed to translate the Christian revelation into terms of their own, to rationalise, to explain it, to bring it more within human comprehension, as they thought."<sup>2</sup> However plausible such interpretations, they were found, when subjected to scrutiny, to involve confusion of thought and self-contradiction which tended to destroy, rather than conserve, the Faith. The mystery of the Incarnation, like the closely associated mystery of the Trinity, was the subject of revelation: with that revelation man must be content. "Christ and His Apostles had delivered to the Church not only the truth, but the whole truth."<sup>3</sup>

Such was the strengthening conviction of the Fathers; and from the time of Irenæus onwards the representative teachers of the Church devoted their energies to the interpretation of Scripture. Nothing, for example, is more notable than the constant appeal of Athanasius and the Nicene Fathers to the word of revelation. Just as conspicuous as this determination to hold fast by the Word was their reluctance to dogmatise beyond certain limits—exhibiting in this respect a marked contrast to the theological temper of subsequent ages. Their main, indeed their one object was to preserve and

<sup>1</sup> The fourth General Council.

<sup>2</sup> Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation*, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Bigg, *u.s.*, p. 196.

hand down the essentials of Christian belief,<sup>1</sup> and to save the world from competing systems of error put forth by those who, consciously or unconsciously, had forsaken the living waters of revelation and hewn out cisterns of their own. Their work was not, like that of the New Testament, creative, but interpretative. The creeds they formulated were in no sense additions to the apostolic faith, but an exposition and co-ordination of that faith. We are familiar with the contention that much of our creed is a theological accretion to the simple truth of the gospel; whereas, as a matter of fact, "nearly every article in our creeds is a protest and a safeguard against arbitrary and fantastic additions."<sup>2</sup>

It would be contrary to fact, as we have shown in an earlier chapter,<sup>3</sup> to assert that the Christian religion was unaffected by its contact with Greek life and thought. This influence was exercised long before the bishops of the Church met at Nicæa. Many of the greatest of the Fathers, from Justin Martyr onwards, owed much of their intellectual grasp of Christian truth to Platonic thought, which, in the second century, entered upon a new stage of its history in the Neoplatonic movement.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, however, essential Christianity held on its way, independent of its alien surroundings. In nothing is this more decisively shown than in the jealous care with which the two central truths of the Christian religion were vindicated—namely, the Trinity and the Incarnation. What the Church did borrow was the *language* of Greek philosophy in which to express her own unique thought. There is no reason for minimising or depreciating the debt thus incurred. It was absolutely necessary, as we saw when dealing with the Arian controversy, to define, and of all languages that of Greece was best fitted for the purpose.

<sup>1</sup> "They limited their dogmatic definitions to those points which seemed absolutely essential, and these were primarily the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity."—Illingworth, *u.s.*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Peile, *u.s.*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter ii.

<sup>4</sup> To some extent the conflict of the Church with the *modalism* of Sabellius and others was a conflict between the Platonic and Aristotelian systems of philosophy. "Our creeds are the formulæ of victorious Platonism."—Inge, *Personal Idealism and Mysticism*, p. 67. So Gwatkin, "Plato has always been the forerunner of the New Testament."—*Knowledge of God*, ii. p. 221.

Moreover, it was inevitable that those who, like the Fathers, had been trained in the philosophical schools of Greece, should express their thoughts in terms with which they were familiar. At the same time, it must not be supposed that men like Athanasius and Basil of Cæsarea thought the language even of Greece equal to the full expression of those transcendental truths with which, as theologians, they had to deal, and "it was with many apologies for the inadequacy of human language, and with a deep sense of the inscrutableness of God,"<sup>1</sup> that they addressed themselves to their task. The framers of our creeds were fully conscious that "at such altitudes words lose their vitality." Their aim was rather to save the Church from false definitions than to provide complete ones. "The decrees of the Councils are but the hedge; the New Testament is the pasture ground."<sup>2</sup> Their work was to transmit unmutilated the apostolic faith, and to express it in terms intelligible to developed and ripened thought.

The work of controversy was often prosecuted with a bitterness strangely in contrast with the spirit of Him whose cause was at stake; but much may be excused to those who are fighting for their life. And it was for nothing less than life that the Church was fighting. Her very life, the very existence of the kingdom of God, as she conceived it, depended upon adequate—that is, Scriptural—views of the person of Christ and of His relation to the human race. If He were obscured, misrepresented, or in any way displaced, the fabric of the Church would be undermined, the foundations would be gone. Such was their conviction, and they acted accordingly. Augustine, it has been said, "by his *Civitas Dei* baptized the dying Roman Empire, and secured to it spiritual life for the future";<sup>3</sup> but Augustine knew of no foundation for that *City of God* save the truth of the Incarnation.

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *u.s.*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Gardner, *The Growth of Christianity*, p. 170.

## CHAPTER X

## THE MODE OF THE INCARNATION

It is impossible in a brief manual to deal adequately with the subject of the Virgin Birth ; it is equally impossible to ignore it ; and in this chapter the attempt will be made, first, to suggest the right way of approaching this article of the Faith, and then to indicate, without pursuing them, some of the arguments by which to meet the obvious difficulties that arise.

It should, at the outset, be distinctly understood that it is belief in the Incarnation that justifies belief in the Virgin Birth, not belief in the Virgin Birth that establishes the truth of the Incarnation. It is for this reason that the subject occupies some of our last, rather than our first, thoughts. It would be waste of time to speak of the miraculous birth to those who do not come to its consideration with the mind at least predisposed towards the truth of the Incarnation. "No purely historical evidence will ever make the supernatural birth of Christ credible, except to a mind which has already, on independent grounds, surrendered to the impression of the supernatural in His person."<sup>1</sup> The early heretic, who accepted the miraculous birth, but denied the Divinity of Christ, has no representatives at the present day. Those only who, on cumulative grounds—some of which it has been our endeavour to set forth—have already accepted the Catholic belief as to the person of our Lord, take the further step of believing in His supernatural birth. The Incarnation must gain the *consent* of our whole being before the Virgin Birth receives the *assent* of the reason. We do not, as in dealing with the Incarnation itself, urge the acceptance of this dogma as supplying the needs of the human soul, but as giving a rational account of the manner in which the Word of God assumed our nature and entered upon the work of redemption. We find it reasonable because, on many grounds, it

<sup>1</sup> Denney, *u.s.*, p. 404.

is impossible to bring Jesus Christ "within the common measures of humanity"; because He is unique—unique in His character, in His teaching, in His consciousness, in His resurrection from the dead—above all in his relation to history.

It has been truly said, "If we decline to recognise a cataclysm between all others and Jesus, we must give up all attempt at any real interpretation of the Gospels or the New Testament; because, from beginning to end of the Scriptural record, there is consistently observed between Jesus and all others a breach of continuity in the fact that He has absolutely transcended the limit of actual or possible human achievement or attainment in the earthly life."<sup>1</sup> In the assured belief that the New Testament writers were justified in this estimate of the person of Christ, we find it less difficult to receive than to reject the account given by the New Testament itself of His human birth. "It was the will of God to beget no second son like Him."<sup>2</sup> Such words are far, indeed, from expressing the fulness of the Christian faith, but they bring out with striking emphasis the unique personality of our Lord. To St. John, St. Paul, St. Peter, nothing was more clear and certain than that Jesus Christ was not simply the evolutionary product of natural antecedents. Such has been the conviction of Christian faith in every age. The world has not deceived itself in believing that, in the coming of Christ, there was a leap in the moral and spiritual world, of which naturalism can give no account or explanation. It is beyond dispute that the impression made by His life and personality upon those who knew Him revolutionised the world, and that He stands forth as the supreme factor in the history of the human race. To Christians of to-day it is as impossible as it was to the Apostles to think of Him as of other men; and the way is thus opened for accepting the belief in a supernatural origin. "Our Lord's supernatural life demands a supernatural birth as its adequate cause."<sup>3</sup>

It would be false to fact to affirm that at the present time belief in the Incarnation is, without exception, bound up with

<sup>1</sup> Du Bose, *u.s.*, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecce Homo*, p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> Griffith Thomas, *The Catholic Faith*, p. 42. And see a paper by the same writer in Orr's *Virgin Birth of Christ*, p. 284 ff.



the acceptance of the Virgin Birth ; nevertheless, it is our conviction that, in the future development of religious thought, the two beliefs will stand and fall together ;<sup>1</sup> it will, that is, be more and more fully recognised that the "universal humanity," the ideal, representative, sinless manhood of our Lord, demands such an origin as the New Testament claims for it ;<sup>2</sup> it will be seen, as Bishop Westcott puts it, that "to deny the Virgin Birth is to make the Lord a man, one man in the race, and not the new man, the Son of Man, in whom the race is gathered up."<sup>3</sup>

The Catholic view of our Lord's personality demands the miraculous birth for this further reason : the doctrine of the Incarnation assumes the pre-existence of Christ, so strongly insisted upon by St. Paul and St. John ; and this implies that the personality of the incarnate Lord was essentially Divine. "Our Lord's Godhead is the seat of His Personality."<sup>4</sup> The Virgin Birth satisfies this fundamental postulate of Christian theology as no other conceivable mode of incarnation could. "If the pre-existent Son of God became incarnate by ordinary generation, we could not escape the conclusion that a human individual person was begotten."<sup>5</sup> Such a view would be in direct contradiction to the belief of the Church, and would throw the whole subject of our Lord's personality into confusion.<sup>6</sup>

The extreme importance of the truth for which we are contending is surely indicated by the fact that those who deny the supernatural birth are hard pressed to defend the sinlessness of our Lord's nature, and frequently end by surrendering this very point—thus abandoning a doctrine absolutely essential to belief in Christ as the Saviour of the world. The

<sup>1</sup> Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pp. 18, 22. Gore, *Dissertations*, pp. 63, 67.

<sup>2</sup> "To speak of a sinless human nature is to speak of something essentially outside the continuity of the species."—Sanday, *Outlines*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Bishop Westcott*, ii. p. 308.

<sup>4</sup> Liddon, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 259.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Briggs, "Criticism and Dogma," *North American Review*, June 1906, p. 872.

<sup>6</sup> See Westcott's remarks on *σὰρξ ἐγένετο* (John i. 14), in his commentary ; Gore, *u.s.*, p. 64 ; Griffith-Jones, *u.s.*, p. 267. On the difficult subject of our Lord's personality, see also Weston, *The One Christ*.

fact is that the Virgin Birth and the sinlessness of Christ both belong to the same category of thought, namely, that of the miraculous, and *a priori* bias against miracle takes exception to both alike. To hold that Christ is sinless, as the Church has taught from the days of the Apostles, is to maintain the transcendental nature of His person. To accept the miraculous in its highest conceivable degree in the Incarnation itself, and to rule out the supernatural from the process whereby this great mystery was realised, were surely unreasonable. A human life that so infinitely transcends the life of other men would seem to demand a unique beginning, and there is no possible alternative between the Virgin Birth and ordinary generation.<sup>1</sup>

The necessary connection between the sinlessness of Christ and the Virgin Birth has been strongly urged by the ablest theologians of the Church.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is argued, was cut off the "entail of sin,"—thus was produced a sinless humanity. For a believer in both it is impossible to disconnect the two things, but the argument carries us into so obscure a region of thought, one so remote from the possibility of demonstration—one, therefore, so open to attack from the agnostic standpoint—that it is unwise to lay too much stress on it. Upon this, however, we insist, namely, that, on the one hand, the miracle of sinlessness demands a miracle of inception, and, on the other, that the narratives of the Infancy correspond with this demand, and supply it. "It is objected," says Professor Orr, "that birth from a virgin does not of itself secure sinlessness. But turn the matter round and ask: Does not perfect sinlessness, on the other hand, imply a miracle in the birth?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Briggs, *u.s.*, p. 867.

<sup>2</sup> See Illingworth, *Divine Immanence*, p. 95; Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 613. Dr. Illingworth points out that "the tradition of the early Church was that only so could the sinful entail be broken off."

<sup>3</sup> *u.s.*, p. 189. It must be carefully borne in mind that, however supernatural in our Lord's case was the Virgin Birth, we do no violence to the principles of science in accepting it. "The mysterious fact of parthenogenesis is widespread in the lower orders of nature, where it is characteristic of whole orders of creatures, while it occurs in other orders occasionally and sporadically."—Griffith-Jones, *u.s.*, p. 262. The writer adds in a footnote the following testimony from Mr. G. Romanes:—"So

The historical evidence for this article of the Christian faith is confined to the Gospel narratives of the Infancy, and at these narratives we must now glance. The historicity of these sections of the first and third Gospels has been more confidently disputed than that of any other, and it would be misleading to contend that the *historical* evidence for the Virgin Birth is conclusive. At the same time, it is easy to show that criticism has dealt unfairly with these narratives, and that careful examination serves to confirm their authenticity.

To begin with, the substantial truth of the birth-stories is strongly supported by the very early currency they obtained. That they are of Jewish-Christian origin and came from Palestine may be regarded as certain, whilst the obvious independence of the two narrators,<sup>1</sup> coupled with the archaic character of the documents, indicates a very early date,<sup>2</sup> not later, it is generally thought, than the middle of the first century. It might be hazardous to argue in favour of the Virgin Birth from the fact that it became the general belief of the Church before the end of the century, but the doctrine does receive strong support from the acceptance of the birth narratives at a time when many Christians of the first generation, including members of the Holy Family itself,

that even if a virgin has ever conceived and borne a son, and even if such a fact in the human species has been unique, still it would not betoken any breach of physiological continuity."—*Darwin and after Darwin*, p. 119. See also Orr, *u.s.*, p. 222. We do not dwell on this point, because however possible, nothing could be much more improbable, from a purely scientific standpoint, than human birth outside the laws of ordinary generation. We have no wish to minimise the supernatural in the mode of the Incarnation.

<sup>1</sup> The two narratives are in no wise contradictory, although it may be impossible to harmonise them.

<sup>2</sup> The early date of these traditions disposes of the contention that in the birth-stories we are dealing with myth or legend. "The Christian tradition belongs to the sphere, not of myth, but of history."—Sanday, *u.s.*, p. 208. Some conservative critics do not claim exact historical accuracy for Matt. i., ii. The Rev. G. H. Box, for example, whilst emphatically rejecting a legendary or mythical origin, and strongly insisting on a basis of fact, finds in the narrative the characteristic features of Midrash or Haggada. See paper contributed to Orr's *Virgin Birth of Christ*, p. 248 ff.

were still alive, and in a position to dispute a doubtful statement.<sup>1</sup>

That of the two accounts which we possess one should clearly be from the standpoint of Joseph, the other, as obviously, from that of the Virgin Mother, is exactly what, under the circumstances, might be expected, and so serves to corroborate the main issue. Nor must it be forgotten that the principal source from which our information comes is the treatise of a physician,—a writer, too, who lays particular emphasis on the carefulness with which his material has been collected. Read, moreover, as the communicated experience of her whose personality dominates this section of the Gospel, namely, the mother of our Lord, St. Luke's account has, for those who come to it without bias, every appearance of verisimilitude, every indication of authenticity. It must be added that a comparison of the canonical Gospels with the apocryphal *Protevangelium Jacobi* will strongly impress the reader with the truthfulness of the former,—the delicacy, the reserve, the simplicity of the one forming a powerful contrast to the triviality, extravagance, even pruriency, of the other.

A few words must be said on the rationalistic contention that the main theme, as well as some of the details, of these birth-stories was borrowed from pagan sources. We must begin by urging the intrinsic unlikelihood of the primitive Church borrowing *anything* from paganism;<sup>2</sup> that the Virgin Birth should have been imported into the "origins" of the Christian religion from tales, often grossly indecent, of

<sup>1</sup> It is but reasonable to suppose that the tradition had the sanction of James and Jude, the Lord's brethren. The only sect of professing Christians who rejected the birth narratives were the Ebionites. Great force would be added to the argument for the authenticity of St. Luke's account, if the earlier date advocated by some scholars for his Gospel could be established. The calumny set on foot by the Jews that our Lord was the illegitimate son of Mary by a Gentile soldier serves to show that they did not believe Him to be the son of Joseph. Bigg, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 39. On the whole subject of the early acceptance of the Virgin Birth, see Gore, *u.s.*, p. 41 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Orr, *u.s.*, p. 175; Knowling, *Our Lord's Virgin Birth and the Criticism of To-day*, p. 42 ff.; Gore, *u.s.*, p. 35; Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*, p. 160 ff. The attempt to find the origin of the Virgin Birth in Isaiah vii. 14 has been almost abandoned. See Gore, *u.s.*, p. 35; Knowling, *u.s.*, p. 54.

heathen mythology is inconceivable. To pass to details—what are they? The source of the visit of the wise men is to be found, we are told, in the coming to Rome of Tiridates, King of Parthia, with magi in his train, to do homage to Nero. Nothing could be more superficial, and therefore inconclusive, than the parallelism thus suggested. The same may be said of the shepherds who appear in the extravagantly childish tale of Mithra.<sup>1</sup> The visit of Asiti to greet the newborn Buddha has been confidently claimed as the original of Simeon's visit to the temple. Any one who desires to study the contrast between full-grown legend and simple narrative of fact cannot do better than place St. Luke's account of Simeon side by side with the story of Asiti. One turns from the one to the other with a sense of thankfulness to the critic for a fresh argument in support of the authenticity of the Gospel.

In like manner the audacity with which alterations in the received text of the third Gospel have been suggested, with the view of setting aside the miraculous conception, tends to defeat itself. An invincible bias against the supernatural would, on purely *a priori* grounds, expunge verses 34, 35, from Luke i. and treat them as a later addition, although no shadow of MS. authority can be claimed for the change. But when these verses have been struck out, what follows? This first violent mutilation of the text involves smaller ones—*virgin*, i. 27, must be deleted; *betrothed*, ii. 5 (R.V.), must become *wife*; further, we must conclude that the interpolator, whoever he may have been, was so clumsy or careless as to leave unaltered such expressions as *His father and mother*, ii. 33 (R.V.), *His parents*, ii. 41, *Thy father and I*, ii. 48. More than this, we find that by thus tampering with the text we lose the key to the whole Gospel of the Infancy according to St. Luke. Why should there be an allusion to the abnormal conception of Elizabeth (i. 36) if there was no intimation in the angel's message of miracle attending the birth of the Messiah? How completely, moreover, the closing words of the genealogy, "Adam, the son of God," lose their point if we suppose St. Luke to have originally written his Gospel on

<sup>1</sup> See Cumont, *u.s.*, p. 132.



the assumption that our Lord's birth was one of ordinary generation! And, finally, does not the complete subordination of Joseph to Mary throughout the narrative find its best explanation in these two disputed verses of the received text?<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to overlook the bearing of such critical methods upon the general question of the trustworthiness of primitive Christian tradition. If the Virgin Birth be not fact, but fable, the general authenticity of the Gospels which embody the fiction is thereby discredited. If St. Luke, for example, was so grossly deceived in respect of the birth of Christ, why not in other matters that he reports? What becomes of the Evangelist's claim to have "traced the course of all things accurately from the first"? What becomes of "the certainty of those things" wherein the Church had been instructed (Luke i. 3, 4)? And where was the guidance of the Holy Spirit when the Evangelists were engaged in the work of compilation?

Much has been made of the silence of the greater part of the New Testament upon the subject of the Virgin Birth. The silence of St. Mark is undeniable. In this Gospel, without introductory matter, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, enters upon the work of the ministry.<sup>2</sup> But can it be fairly and

<sup>1</sup> We only have space to add in a note that there has been a corresponding dispute (but it must be admitted with more reason on the part of the critic) over the true text of Matt. i. 16, where the Sinaitic palimpsest, discovered by Mrs. Lewis in 1892, reads, "Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary, the Virgin, begat Jesus, who is called Christ." If (which is extremely doubtful) the reading of the palimpsest be the original one, the only possible meaning, in view of the context (v. 18 ff.), would be that our Lord's mother was under the full legal protection of Joseph, and that he was socially regarded as the father of Jesus. The phrase would imply, not physical descent, but legal heirship. A betrothed woman, according to Israelitish law, already occupied the status of a wife. Bishop Gore, dealing with the genealogies, remarks that "Jewish ideas of genealogy were largely putative. . . . It is, therefore, more than likely that it would have been held that the espousal of Joseph and Mary constituted Jesus Joseph's son for all the purposes of Jewish reckoning," *u.s.*, p. 38. For a discussion of the text, and of the whole subject, see Knowling, *u.s.*, p. 28 ff.; Sanday, *u.s.*, p. 197; *Church Quarterly Review*, July 1904, p. 386 ff.

<sup>2</sup> On St. Mark's silence, see Gore, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 77, and *Dissertations*, p. 6.

confidently maintained that the Virgin Birth finds no place in the fourth Gospel? Before noticing some more than probable references to this truth, we must call attention to the very general belief that St. John did not write without acquaintance with the Synoptics. Apart, however, from this, is it conceivable that the author, whoever he may have been, writing at the close of the century, could have been ignorant of a belief generally accepted by the Church of that period, and incorporated by two of the Evangelists in their narrative? Surely from the very fact that this Gospel contains no direct statement upon the subject, it may be inferred that what was generally believed in the Church had the writer's full consent.<sup>1</sup>

Now, however, let the prologue of the fourth Gospel be read beneath the light of the Lord's supernatural birth, and it will be seen that thought and language alike are in perfect harmony with what St. Matthew and St. Luke have told us on this mysterious subject. "It is difficult to suppose that St. John did not interpret to himself in some way the process underlying such terms as "became flesh," "came down from heaven," "came into the world." . . . Of all possible speculations as to how the Word might become flesh, that which harmonises best with the tenor of the Gospel is the Virgin Birth."<sup>2</sup> In v. 13 we read, "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man (*ἄνδρός*) but of God."<sup>3</sup> Even as the text stands, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth gives point to the language, for, "Why the elaboration of the theme, above all, why *ἐκ θελήματος ἄνδρός*, unless he has in mind the supernatural birth of the Logos as a kind of pattern or model of the birth of the children of God? As He was born into the world by supernatural conception, not through the

<sup>1</sup> Nor must we forget the tradition that represents St. John in conflict with Cerinthus, who was among the first to deny the Virgin Birth. On St. John's relation to Cerinthian error, see Westcott's *Epistles of John*, p. xxxiv. ff.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, "Birth of Christ in the New Testament," *Interpreter*, Oct. 1905, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> There was a reading known to Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Tertullian, though not found in any existing MS., in which *ὅς* (sing.) was substituted for *οἱ* (pl.). This would make the writer's allusion to the Virgin Birth almost obvious, especially as the word *ἄνδρός* (husband, male, as opposed to female) is used. See Allen, *u.s.*, p. 55.

process of human generation, so were they born out of the world into the higher life by a spiritual process, symbolised, indeed, by generation, but transcending it.”<sup>1</sup> Still more unmistakable is the reference to the Virgin Birth in the phrase “The Word became flesh” (σὰρξ ἐγένετο). “The expression suggests an event absolutely different from ordinary generation.”<sup>2</sup> Commenting on these words, Bishop Westcott says, “The fact of the miraculous conception, though not stated, is necessarily implied by the Evangelist. The coming of the Word into flesh is presented as a creative act in the same way as the coming of all things into being was.”<sup>3</sup>

Again, it has been keenly debated whether St. Paul even knew of the primitive tradition that claimed a supernatural birth for Christ. In view of the fact that for years he was the companion of St. Luke, it is difficult to believe that he was ignorant of what has so prominent a place in the third Gospel.<sup>4</sup> When we examine his writings, it must be admitted that there is nothing that we can claim as directly and indisputably referring to the Virgin Birth. On the other hand, the doctrine is in strict harmony with St. Paul’s view of Christ as the new and sinless Head of the human race,<sup>5</sup> and may well be regarded as the root of his teaching (as likewise of St. John’s) in regard to the pre-existence of our Lord. Further, when the Apostle speaks of Christ’s entrance into the world, it is generally with a phrase or a word that suggests something alien

<sup>1</sup> See Allen, *u.s.*, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> See an article by A. Carr on “The Testimony of St. John to the Virgin Birth of our Lord,” *Expositor*, ser. vii. vol. iii. p. 313.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on St. John *in loc.* Dr. Ottley finds an allusion to the Virgin Birth in ὁ ἀνωθεν ἐρχόμενος (iii. 31); Professor Orr also in iii. 6. Bishop Gore forcibly maintains that the writer of Rev. xii. must have been acquainted with the belief in the Virgin Birth. It may be added that there is a variant from the received text of v. 18 with strong MS. support, in which ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς is replaced by μονογενὴς θεός. Here again there appears to be a pointed reference to the supernatural birth. See Carr, *u.s.*, p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> It may be inferred that St. Luke’s account of the birth is earlier than St. Matthew’s, inasmuch as the latter is that of an apologist for the miraculous conception in the face of Jewish calumny. Professor Briggs points out that the Christology implied in Luke i. 26–37 is earlier than that of St. John, St. Paul, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. *Messiah of the Gospels*, p. 50, n. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. v. 12 ff., 1 Cor. xv. 45, 47.

from ordinary experience;<sup>1</sup> and on comparing Luke i. 31-35 with Rom. i. 3, 4, a remarkable parallelism of thought is found to exist between the Apostle and the Evangelist.<sup>2</sup> That St. Paul lays no peculiar stress on the Virgin Birth in his writings may well be due to the fact that, like St. John, he approaches the truth of the Incarnation from its divine rather than its human side, and that for him, as for ourselves, the truth "rested on its own broad evidence in the Person and work of Christ, and was attested by the great public fact of the resurrection."<sup>3</sup>

Limitation of space has forbidden more than a brief survey of a highly controversial subject. What has been said, however, has been said under firm conviction of the impossibility of treating the Virgin Birth as an open question. If a fact, it is not only a sign from heaven, but must have an important bearing upon the constitution of our Lord's person. Such was the view taken by the Fathers from Ignatius onwards; such up to our own day has been the Church's unwavering belief. It has been aptly pointed out that "a truth may not be the foundation of our faith, yet once it is known, may be found so closely related to what is vital in our faith, that our faith may thenceforth feel it to be indispensable, and would be greatly impoverished without it."<sup>4</sup> This, for most of us, is surely true of the Virgin Birth. To part with this belief has often proved, will often prove again, a first step in the process of thought which ends in denying the redemptive work and character of Jesus Christ—a process of thought which, when once set in motion, finds its logical conclusion in an ethical form of Christianity, from which all that is miraculous and transcendental has been eliminated. To maintain with the theology now in the ascendant in many quarters, that Jesus, however supreme as a religious genius, "never outstepped the limits of the purely human," is (need it be said?) to give up the Christ of the New Testament, the Christ of history, the Christ of the Church, for another Christ, who may teach, but cannot redeem.

We conclude with the words of one far better qualified to

<sup>1</sup> Rom. i. 3, 4; Gal. iv. 4; 1 Tim. i. 15, iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Orr, *u.s.*, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

speak than the writer of these pages—"Only a God-man who had taken human nature into organic union with Himself, and so identified Himself with the human race as to become the common Man, the second Adam, the head of the race, could redeem the race. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth gives us such a God-man. Natural generation could not possibly give us such a God-man. Therefore the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is essential to the integrity of the Incarnation, as the Incarnation is to the doctrine of Christ and Christian salvation."<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER XI

### CHRISTIANITY THE RELIGION OF THE INCARNATION

IN these last words our thoughts may revert to the opening chapter, in which what we ventured to call the dynamic power of the Incarnation was briefly dealt with. Thus, at the outset, we treated our subject from a practical point of view. History depicts the world as finding in Christianity a religion which could meet its felt and realised needs better than any other, and for that reason adopting it as its own. It was a case of spiritual selection, an illustration, in the world of spirit, of the survival of the fittest. In this closing section it will be our aim to deal with the Incarnation on the same practical lines, but from a more personal and experimental standpoint; and since what we still have to say is, in some measure, a recapitulation, we may be excused if certain statements and arguments are repeated which have already been presented to the reader.

"It is Christianity or nothing," said George Romanes,<sup>2</sup> as he groped his way back into the light. *It is Christianity or nothing*, because there is no serious rival to compete with it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Briggs, "Criticism and Dogma," *North American Review*, June 1906, p. 873.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, p. 379.

<sup>3</sup> "In dealing with religion, is it not, after all, with the Christian religion alone that we have to do? Other religions no longer stir the depths of our hearts."—Harnack, *u.s.*, p. 6; and see Scott Lidgett, *u.s.*, p. 103.



This assertion is often met by pointing to the fact that Buddhism claims a larger number of adherents than Christianity. To this it surely may be replied that, whatever else Buddhism may be, it is not a religion in any true sense of the term. A system of teaching which begins by ruling God out of the universe, and ends with Nirvâna, is not a religion. That there is much that is beautiful and true in the best of Buddhist thought far be it from us to dispute; and if, after facing the question as between theism and atheism, we should deliberately adopt the latter, the pessimistic negations of Buddhism may seem more reasonable than the optimistic outlook of Christianity, whilst its precepts of benevolence and self-mastery would commend it to serious consideration. But let us clearly understand that, in taking atheism or pantheism as our basis of thought, we cut ourselves adrift from religion; and in asserting that it is "Christianity or nothing" we speak for those to whom a Supreme Being is still an indispensable hypothesis, and who, at least in this Western world, vastly outnumber the advocates of materialism.

It cannot, indeed, be denied that Christianity is, at the present time, an equivocal term, and that many who, quite justly from their point of view, make much of their Christianity, have lost their hold on dogma, and are, whether they avow it or not, intellectually speaking, Unitarians or Agnostics. The last thing we should wish to do is to refuse the name of Christian to those who deny the Divinity, but follow the example, of Christ, and whose life may put to shame that of many whose dogmatic faith has never been disturbed. The fact, however, must be faced that, in parting with the doctrine of the Incarnation, they have broken with the continuity of the Faith. Christianity cannot in the twentieth, any more than in the fourth century, be the same thing for those who accept and those who deny the Godhead of Christ. We have but to think of the place our Lord holds in Christian worship to realise the gulf that divides those who confess from those who deny the truth of the Incarnation. Lord Tennyson stood with his son in Westminster Abbey, listening to the music, as it floated from the choir; suddenly he said, "It is beautiful, but what an empty and awful mockery, if there were no God!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Tennyson*, iv. p. 20.

A somewhat similar thought presents itself as we take part in the Te Deum, the Creeds, the Litany—above all, perhaps, in the Communion Office. How much empty mockery, if Christ be no legitimate object of worship! What unreality, if the Divine life is not, as the Church has always taught, mediated through the Word made flesh!

It is Christianity or nothing. That the ethics of the New Testament have supplanted and superseded other systems is a matter of history; so that "a great part of the best morality of the day is an inheritance, acknowledged or unacknowledged, from Christianity."<sup>1</sup> And, so far from denying that there is a vast amount of Christian morality in the world apart from definite Christian belief, we must rejoice that it is so, and recognise in the fact a striking tribute to Him who is the source of all that is distinctively Christian. At the same time, we have the right to ask whether what is avowedly the fruit of the Gospel will continue to abound when the very heart of that Gospel has been torn from it. "What is wanting?" said an Eastern monarch, as he pointed to a scene of splendour that filled his soul with exultation. "Stability," whispered the philosopher at his side. It may be too soon as yet to pronounce the doom of Christian ethics divorced from Christian faith; but signs are surely not wanting that the morality of the Gospel is bound up with the transcendentalism of the Gospel. Can it be denied that, as definite faith loosens its hold upon society, there is a tendency in the wealthier class to relapse into paganism—paganism, as it has been said, "without the pagan conscience and without the pagan virtues"—and in the poorer to embrace the principles of socialistic anarchy,—both tendencies equally rooted in selfishness?<sup>2</sup> "It concerns us to be on our guard against the temptation of thinking that we can have the fruit or flower and yet destroy the root—that we may retain the high view of human nature which has grown with the growth of Christian nations, and discard

<sup>1</sup> Peile, *u.s.*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche (himself the apostle of modern paganism) ridicules those who think they have no need of Christianity as a guarantee of morality, and give up Christian belief, while they cling more firmly than ever to Christian ethics. See *Cambridge Theological Essays*, p. 571.

that revelation of Divine and human destiny of which that view forms a part or a consequence; that we may maintain the moral energy, and yet make light of the faith that produced it.”<sup>1</sup> We have no right or reason to believe that a system would very long survive that which gave it birth, and has hitherto sustained it.

On very similar grounds we should predict the failure of the theological method, at the present time identified with the name of the Abbé Loisy, to control the conduct and christianise the life of the world. Effective, formative faith demands an objective basis. To pretend that legend can replace historic fact without affecting conduct is an outrage on common sense. “The æsthetic cry (never louder than in our own time) is always, If the legend, the doctrine, the ceremony is beautiful, it is none the worse for being false, or teaching falsehood. And with the divorce of truth from religion went its divorce from practical life.”<sup>2</sup> Christian conduct was placed by St. John and St. Paul upon the foundation of the incarnate life and presence of the Son of God. On that foundation it has rested ever since; and if historical criticism should succeed in destroying that foundation, it will have removed the one effective sanction of Christian morality.

We should, however, make a great mistake if we regarded the Gospel exclusively, or even primarily, from an ethical point of view. We have altogether failed to express our inmost conviction unless we have made it clear that the religion of the Incarnation is, above and before everything else, a revelation of God and of man’s relation to a spiritual world; “The life was manifested, and we have seen it.”

<sup>1</sup> Church, *u.s.*, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> Gwatkin, *u.s.*, i. p. 298; and cp. p. 145. See also Inge, *u.s.*, p. 185. “We cannot any longer value a religious dogma which we have come to believe to be only a figment of the imagination. It would be hardly worth asserting, if it had not been so often questioned, that religious belief claims objective truth for the articles of its creed, and cannot continue to hold them if it is obliged to give up their objective truth.” Dr. Bigg quaintly remarks of Ritschlianism, which bears a close resemblance to Abbé Loisy’s system, that, “like a man who disarms the robber by going naked, it makes peace with science by excluding from the kingdom of God all that science can possibly dispute.”—*Neoplatonism*, p. 140.

That life was itself a perfect expression of the moral law, as it ideally exists in the Divine nature; at the same time it was infinitely more. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." So we may believe St. John to have paraphrased the language of Christ Himself. He wrote with a long Christian experience behind him. The Gospel meant for him, not a code of morality, but a spiritual and eternal world—a life hid with Christ in God. The *moral* was the corollary of the *spiritual* aspect of the Christian revelation. Had the first teachers of Christianity reversed the Divine order, putting the moral before the spiritual, their work would have been a failure; the world would have been unmoved by their appeal. The Christian life, as taught and practised by the Apostles, is a life of love lived in the presence and in the power of Christ. This is vastly more than a code of ethics; it is a *life*—a life lifted into a spiritual sphere of being, and proving its reality by the conquest of self. The spiritual side of religion cannot be depreciated without a paralysing effect upon its work. Bishop Westcott, writing in 1865, says, "I cannot think that any estimate of our Lord's work and person which starts from its ethical side can be other than fatally deceptive. This was not that which the Apostles preached, and not this could have conquered the world. I feel more strongly than I dare express that it is this so-called Christian morality as 'the sum of the Gospel' which makes Christianity so powerless now."<sup>1</sup>

At the risk of repetition, we would urge that, for nearly two thousand years, Jesus Christ has had for his Church the religious value of God. Dr. Chalmers expressed the general Christian conviction when he said, "I find that without a hold on Christ, there is no hold of God at all."<sup>2</sup> It is just this hold on God through faith in Christ that has made the Christian religion such a living power in the world, a power

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Bishop Westcott*, i. p. 289. The well-known words of Irenæus, "*Vita hominis, visio Dei*," were a favourite quotation with Bishop Westcott. See ii. p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> Hanna, *Life of Dr. Chalmers*, ii. p. 448. Cp. *Origen contr. Celsum*. "God is known to us, as far as He can be known, in the Incarnate Christ." See Bigg, *Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 260.

as active and effective to-day as it ever was. The work of Jesus Christ within us and around us is the work of one who is truly God. He is the living, life-giving Person now that St. Paul found and proclaimed Him. We, like the Apostle, put the word of Christ to the test and verify it. This realisation of the power of Christ, this daily strengthening for conflict and duty, this spiritual illumination, constitutes, for those who know Him and the power of His resurrection, the most conclusive proof of His essential Divinity. Nor is it as if the experience were a solitary one; it is collective, corporate—an experience of many souls, many ages, many races. Even when the Church had wandered farthest from the truth, the world was not left without witness to the energising, fructifying presence of Christ. A power there is making for righteousness that the historian, whether orthodox or otherwise, cannot but trace to the life and work of Christ. Is it more reasonable to believe with Matthew Arnold that this power is an impersonal cosmic tendency,<sup>1</sup> or, with the Church, that the living Christ is working out the eternal purpose of a righteous God, which is to make the whole world a kingdom of righteousness?<sup>2</sup> Rational faith, we need hardly say, demands more than this; its appeal is to history; at the same time, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this argument from experience, as confirming truth which has already been intellectually apprehended.<sup>3</sup> If we succeed in persuading ourselves that the greatest movement in history is to be traced to an illusion on the part of a few Jewish peasants, we shall not hesitate to take the further step of suggesting a psychological explanation for the Christian experience of nineteen centuries. But in doing so we shall

<sup>1</sup> His words are "The Eternal Power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness."—*Literature and Dogma*, p. 219. The pantheistic intent of the phrase (which in varying terms recurs with wearisome reiteration throughout the book) is quite clear from the context. See pp. 43, 167, and especially p. 328 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Gore reminds us that righteousness is only conceivable as the attribute of a person, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 31. Cp. a noteworthy confession of experience in *An Agnostic's Progress* (W. B. Palmer), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> See Illingworth, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 170. On the argument from Christian experience Dr. Dale's *Living Christ and the Four Gospels* should be read.



raise greater difficulties than we attempt to solve, and substitute an inefficient for an efficient cause.

In the limited space still at our disposal we would call attention to some of the features of Christianity which have made it the religion of humanity, and which are bound up with belief in the Incarnation. We may admit that such features tend to predispose towards the belief with which they are associated, and thus suggest the inference that Christian dogma is to be explained on the principle that the wish is father to the thought. If, however, we assume that the world is rational and purposive, we shall necessarily hold that *worth* is, at least in some measure, the test of reality, and that what promotes our true development, carries with it, according to the degree of its helpfulness, a presumption of its truth; an argument which, in the present instance, is obviously cumulative, since it is not one, but many things, that give Christianity its supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

(a) We may, in the first place, consider its characteristic of universality, its power to adapt itself to different times and races. It has met the fundamental needs of human nature. In Christ there is neither male nor female, Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free. When such words were written, they were words of prophecy. True, the Apostle had tested the power of the Gospel in many places, among many peoples, but the day had not arrived when this could be stated as an historic fact. We, with nineteen hundred years of history behind us, can say, "He is for all men and for all time."<sup>2</sup> But it is only in the power of the Incarnation that Christ thus embraces the whole world of man. The adaptableness of the Christian religion is rooted in the catholicity of Christ's manhood. The ever-shifting needs of the world have only served to draw forth the latent potencies of the Christian religion; and this because it is the religion of the Universal Man. The fact that this has not been as fully recognised as it should have been—that accidentals have often been mistaken for essentials—that the Church has

<sup>1</sup> For the unique power of the Christian religion to satisfy man's realised need of reconciliation, see chapter v.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott, *Religious Thought in the West*, p. 352.

been too stereotyped in her methods—has often bound when she should have loosed—has been governed by precedent rather than principle—largely accounts for the halting progress of the cause of Christ. The Christian, just so far as he works from the basis and lives in the atmosphere of the Incarnation, will be all things to all men.

(b) In closest possible connection with this inherent power of adaptation, and forming the most important element in it, is the moral ideal that the Incarnation has provided for the world.<sup>1</sup> Wherever Christianity has established itself, Christ has become an "objective conscience." His life and example have been accepted as the touchstone of character and conduct. This was only possible through an assured belief in His sinlessness, and this belief is bound up with the truth of the Incarnation. The world had long been waiting for a master-life; in the life of Christ this was found. It has been truly said that "Christianity insists on looking at man in the light of the ideal and regarding not what men are, but what they ought to be."<sup>2</sup> Such was the method of Christianity, but in order to give practical effect to the method it was necessary to exhibit the ideal in concrete form. It is this ideal that has worked as leaven in human society.<sup>3</sup> An exalted, even unattainable standard is not the unpractical thing that it might seem apart from the appeal to experience.<sup>4</sup> Experience proves that the Christian ideal has been fruitful, not in one, but in many degrees of moral elevation. The religion of Christ is, indeed, to be judged by its best fruits, which would not have been produced without the pattern of the Incarnate Word; the saints of the Church would never have given their witness without the master-life, which, just because it was the life of the Incarnation, stimulated and guided, without discouraging the efforts of imperfect human nature. But, in addition to this, many lives, short of conspicuous sanctity, are vastly purer, better, more conscientious than they would have been without the Gospel standard, while the mass of humanity

<sup>1</sup> And see chapter iv.

<sup>2</sup> Gardner, *Growth of Christianity*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> See a beautiful and striking passage in Lecky's *History of European Morals*, ii. p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See Moberly, *u.s.*, p. 294; Westcott, *u.s.*, p. 356.

has been lifted to a higher level than that of paganism through the dominating force of Christian influence. It has been brought as a charge against the early Church that it too much ignored the virtues of civic life, and, by cultivating a spirit of "other-worldliness," robbed the present world of energies that of right belonged to it. That the charge may, to some extent, be substantiated from the history of the Church's relation to the Empire may be admitted; but Christians, like all men, have the defects of their qualities, and it cannot fairly be said that, either in the life of our Lord, or in the teaching of the New Testament generally, there is anything to discourage the practice of public virtues; on the contrary, the obligations of both public and social life are implicit in the doctrine of the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> Nor must it be forgotten that those who were accused of incivism were, at the very time, under the ban of the law, and accounted aliens from the commonwealth on account of their religion.<sup>2</sup>

(c) Christianity, whilst furnishing the ideal, brought with it a motive power by which the ideal might be approximately realised. The Christian religion is, far beyond any other, a religion of the affections. The expulsive power of a new affection has been its strength and glory from the first. "The love of Christ constraineth us": more than eighteen hundred years have passed since St. Paul wrote the words, but they are as true to-day as when they were written. Christ, the personal Christ, is still a living power—surely the greatest of living forces; and His power is the power of love. Here is a proof of His Divinity which outweighs all others, this personal love of the sinner for His Saviour, of the disciple for his Master—this empire of Christ over human hearts. Wonderful, far beyond the wonder of miracles in the world of nature, is this fact, "that Jesus Christ, crucified, dead and buried, more than eighteen hundred years ago, has inspired in every age, and amongst wholly diverse nations, in thousands after thousands of sinful and saintly hearts alike, not merely reverence for His memory, or sympathy for His sufferings, or enthusiasm for His cause, but a personal, passionate, living adoration, passing the love of women, and characterised by a finality, a restfulness, a

<sup>1</sup> See Cairns, *Christianity in the Modern World*, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> See Bigg, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 329.

peace which finite objects can never afford. That this is so is a fact beyond the reach of controversy, and a fact which defies explanation on any other view than that Jesus Christ is God—the infinite, therefore adequate, Object of human love.”<sup>1</sup>

(d) We may think again of the Incarnation as it influenced men's thoughts about their own body. The very conception of God clothed in flesh kindled a reverent regard for the nature He assumed. Christians were taught not only that they belonged to Christ, but that they were a part of Him: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” (1 Cor. vi. 15). As such, those bodies must be used as instruments of righteousness—above all things must they be kept from uncleanness. Chastity was no part of Greek or Latin ethics.<sup>2</sup> The obscenity of the stage, the pruriency of the literature, the absolute right of master over slave, the shameless toleration of unnatural vice, combine to throw a lurid light upon the question of sex in the world into which the Gospel was launched. It is only necessary to point out that the doctrine of the Incarnation revolutionised the ideals of the world on this subject. “The penitential discipline and exhortations from the pulpit diffused abroad an immeasurably higher sense of the importance of purity than pagan antiquity had known.”<sup>3</sup> The teaching of the Church, which invested the marriage tie with sacramental significance, and strictly forbade any intercourse but that of wedded life, was rooted in her belief in the Incarnation,<sup>4</sup> and Christian purity is one of the many fruits of that truth.

(e) What has just been said in regard to the body is, in reality, part of a larger subject, namely, the dignity of human nature. “The value of a truly great man consists in his increasing the value of all mankind.”<sup>5</sup> It is quite impossible to estimate the debt that, from this point of view, the world owes to Christ. It is not only that, in basing His appeal to

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *University and Cathedral Sermons*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Morality rapidly deteriorated in Rome after the Punic wars, and before the opening of the Christian era the marriage tie had lost much of its sacredness.

<sup>3</sup> Lecky, *u.s.*, ii. p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> Ephes. v. 25-33.

<sup>5</sup> Harnack, *u.s.*, p. 67.

the world on the Fatherhood of God, He raised man to a position he had never consciously held before—but also that, in identifying Himself with the human race, He conferred on every individual of the family of man a new and imperishable worth. In view of the Incarnation, every human life was precious: it was the Incarnation that raised woman to a position of equality with man, that constituted infanticide and suicide a crime, that made the abandonment of slavery only a question of time, that laid the foundations of a healthy democracy. But it did more than this. From the Incarnation sprang an “enthusiasm of humanity” quite alien from the thought of the ancient world. In a beautiful passage of his writings<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gardner ascribes the “enthusiasm of humanity” to the teaching of Christ. This is only part of the truth. The teaching of our Lord would not have kindled this enthusiasm apart from belief in His person. It was as the Church apprehended the universality of Christ’s manhood that she awoke to the sense of her duty towards man; “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me”; it was from such words that the Church drew her inspiration. “The religion of humanity was the invention of Jesus Christ, and would never have survived the storms of the early ages to blossom in the modern world except under the protecting shelter of the belief that Jesus Christ was God. . . . Without belief in that doctrine, it would never have existed, and without belief in that doctrine it will not continue to exist. The religion of humanity has never been a social force except under the protection of the Christian creed.”<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly it is to the religion of the Incarnation that we can trace that altered estimate of human life which has revolutionised—rather, is revolutionising—the world, and has established principles which, when allowed free play, will work out the social salvation of man. Just so far as the Incarnation, with its corollaries of Divine Fatherhood and human brotherhood, has influenced thought, have social

<sup>1</sup> *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Illingworth, *u.s.*, p. 35. See also Lecky, *Rise and Influence of Rationalism*, ii. p. 405; Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 513; Ballard, *Christian Essentials*; p. 272.



abuses and tyrannies been recognised and attacked.<sup>1</sup> The preciousness of life, the worth of the individual—these are distinctively Christian conceptions. “The Gospel of Christ transformed and reinvigorated the dying world of antiquity because of its emphasis on the individual.”<sup>2</sup> Men first learned their essential equality as they knelt, master and slave, side by side, at the Table of the Lord; it was in the same school that the lesson of universal brotherhood was taught.

(f) We cannot omit from the things which the Christian holds dear, and which are his through faith in the Incarnation, the hope of immortality. Mithra-worship and other Eastern cults owed much of their popularity, as we have already seen, to the confidence with which they promised a future life to their votaries; nor is it disputed that the still clearer teaching of the Church on this subject gave Christianity a great advantage over all other religions in the struggle for mastery. With the advance of theistic belief in the early centuries of our era the craving for immortality became deeper and more passionate. Naturally so, for this inextinguishable desire is surely, in the first instance, an intuition of the soul that realises, however vaguely, its relation to God and the unseen world. But it also expresses a natural shrinking of self-conscious being from annihilation. “Whether or not nature abhors a vacuum,” said Thomas Huxley, “I know that the soul of man does.”<sup>3</sup> That is true; and for this very reason we are apt to suspect ourselves of credulity, and to fear that, here at least, the wish has been father to the thought. The world needed a solid basis for its belief. This Mithraism could not give; the Christian found it in the accepted fact of the Resurrection. Nor is it otherwise to-day. If we analyse the grounds of our belief in a future life, we shall confess that

<sup>1</sup> Not that the religion of the Incarnation has always been the religion of the visible Church. The present writer is in full agreement with Canon Hensley Henson’s remarks on this subject in *Notes on Popular Rationalism*, p. 180. See also some observations at the close of the first chapter of this manual.

<sup>2</sup> Bussell, *Christian Theology and Social Progress*, p. 140. The main contention of these Bampton Lectures for 1905 is that an ideal Christianity is the only system of religion that can satisfy the democratic aspirations of the present day.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters of G. J. Romanes*, p. 347.

every argument in its favour has little weight compared with the fact of Christ's resurrection. It is to that that we turn for assurance of the life to come. And to say this is to say that our hope of immortality is bound up with belief in the Incarnation, of which the Resurrection, if a fact, is the most signal proof. As a matter of experience, men cease to believe in Christ's resurrection because they have already ceased to believe in His incarnation. The Incarnation carries with it the Resurrection, as the greater contains the less; and nothing so surely dims the hope of immortality as loss of faith in the resurrection of our Lord. It is the fashion in some quarters, at the present time, to disparage, even deride, the desire for a future life; but the fundamental instincts of humanity do not change. Doubtless this desire may be obtruded in a selfish form, and lay itself open to the charge of exaggerated individualism; but nothing short of a radical and (let us boldly say) retrograde change in human nature will extinguish the craving to outlive death. This craving finds its reasonable justification in the risen life of the incarnate Christ; and we say with the Apostle, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

. . . . .

"The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The great subject of the Incarnation is not without its grave perplexities, but is there any other truth that throws light upon the problems of existence? Instead of getting rid of mystery by abandoning our Christian faith, we shall only find ourselves confronted by still greater mysteries. "After all," as it has been said, "the greatest wonder of the world is its existence."<sup>1</sup> We only add to the wonder, the confusion, the darkness, by denying a rational principle to the universe, and by eliminating a moral and spiritual purpose from history. In the Incarnation we find this rational principle, we recognise this moral and spiritual purpose. Agnosticism does not pretend to solve any fundamental difficulty; it is, indeed, on its own showing, a confession of despair. It was from this condition of impotence

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 218.

that Christ rescued a world fully as capable of profound thought, fully as competent to deal with the problems of life, as our own. Those problems, apart from revelation, are the same for every age, invariably impelling the thoughtless in the direction of materialism, the serious in that of pessimism. "The only possible alternative to Christianity is a profound and reasonable pessimism."<sup>1</sup> If such be the case, if the ultimate issue be between Christianity and pessimism, it is for Christianity to give a good account of itself. The work of the Holy Spirit, it has been said, is to "exhibit a Christophany in the life of humanity itself."<sup>2</sup> When we reflect how dim and defective is this Christophany in the great mass of professing Christians to-day, can we wonder that the Church has to confess failure and loss? The most convincing proof of the Incarnation is a Church worthy of her Head. Origen, in his controversy with paganism, appeals again and again to the Christian life and the Christian society as "the one crowning proof of the truth of the Gospel, the miracle of all miracles."<sup>3</sup> Here is the argument that is never outworn or antiquated—one that the simplest, humblest Christian can use as effectually as the philosopher for the honour of his Lord. The triumphs of Christianity still depend, as in the days of Irenæus and Clement, more on the love and loyalty of the rank and file than upon the learning and skill of the apologist. "The noblest truths are not given us for an intellectual luxury, still less for a moral opiate or a spiritual charm. They are for the inspiration of our whole being, for the hallowing, and for the bracing of every power, outward and inward, with which we are endowed, for use in the busy fields of common duty."<sup>4</sup> Pre-eminently true is this of the noblest of all truths, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us"—dwelt among us that He might dwell in us. And in taking knowledge of us that we "have been with Jesus," the world will have the best of all proofs that Jesus Christ is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

<sup>1</sup> Peile, *u.s.*, p. 107; cp. Bussell, *u.s.*, pp. 297-314.

<sup>2</sup> *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Bigg, *Christian Platonists*, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> Westcott, *Christus Consummator*, p. 148.

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